' Our Dialogue '

the Religious Editor
Arab News
Jeddah

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Hadith -

Indeed,
the creation of each one of you
is brought together in the mother's belly
for 40 days in the form of a drop of sperm,
then he is a germ-cell for a like period,
then an embryonic lump for a like period,
then there is sent to him the angel
who blows the breath of life into him
& who is commanded about four matters:
to write down his means of livelihood,
his life span, his actions
and whether happy or unhappy.

By Allah,
other than whom there is no God,
one of you may behave like the people of paradise
until there is but an arm's length between him and it,
and that which has been written overtakes him
and so he behaves like the people of hell fire
and thus he enters it;
and one of you behaves like the people of hell fire
until there is but an arm's length between him and it,
and that which has been written overtakes him
and so he behaves like the people of paradise
and thus he enters it."

(Related by Al Bukhari & Muslim.)

•Should a Muslim woman cover her face?

My wife and I have recently become Muslims. On visiting Madinah recently, my wife was told by a door attendant at the Prophet's Mosque that she must cover her face. He quoted the Qur'anic verse which may be rendered in translation; "Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and believing women to wear their outer garments over themselves [Added: some ulema in the Indo-Pak have translated as 'over their faces'.] " He told us that it was obligatory for a woman to cover her face. However, we read in a translation of a book written by M.N.Albani that for a woman to cover her face is preferable but not obligatory. Please comment.

Sheikh Albani is one of the leading authorities on Hadith in the Muslim world today. I know him personally and I can assure you that he does not hesitate to say what he believes to be the truth and to support it with evidence from the Qur'an and Haditn. Like every human being, he may make mistakes. In this particular instance, he is certainly right. He has written a book on the type of dress a Muslim woman should wear in particular. The book is well researched and the style is clear and easily understood.

As for what the door attendant told you, I am afraid he has given the Qur'anic verse, he quoted to you, a meaning to fit his own view. I have no doubt that he means well, and that he does not recognize his mistake. The verse he quotes demands Muslim women to lengthen their dresses so that they are distinguished from other women. The type of dress with which it is concerned is the normal dress a woman wears. That dress cannot be made to cover her head, her face and her body. What the Qur'anic verse tells Muslim women is not to have their dresses short. They should lengthen them so as to cover their legs right down to their ankles. I have often quoted the Hadith which states that Asmaa', the Prophet's sister-in-law, once entered his home wearing a dress made of transparent material. The Prophet said to her: "Asmaa' when a women attains puberty, nothing should be seen of her body except this and this (pointing to his face and forearms)." The way this Hadith is phrased means that the face and forearms of a woman may be seen by others. This clearly means that it is not at all obligatory for Muslim women to cover their faces. No one may force a Muslim, woman or man, to do something Allah has not imposed.

•When does a day start - according to Islamic traditions?

A day starts at the time when Fajr, or dawn prayer falls due. That takes place, roughly speaking, at about one and a half hour before sunrise. The common practice of considering that a day begins at 12 mid-night is simply an agreed convention. People may have agreed to start a day at sunrise or at 7 o'clock in the morning or at any particular time. From the Islamic point of view, it starts with the first act of worship in a 24-hour cycle; and marked by a new chance to earn reward from Allah for good actions which may be done during the day.

We have a hadith in which the Prophet is quoted to have said : " With every break of dawn, a voice cries out : son of Adam, I am a new creation to witness your actions. Do make the best of me because I shall never return until the day of judgement. "

•Young children's inheritance.

If in a Muslim family, a man died at a young age, leaving behind minor children and his father has survived him - the question is whether the minor children will have any claim over the property of their grand father (the father of the minor children's father). The inheritance of the assets of the deceased father are very clear. For instance the deceased left behind two minor children. The division of the property of the children's father is effected as follows : One sixth to his father (i.e. the grand father) and a similar portion (i.e. one sixth) to his mother if she has also survived him. His wife inherits one eighth. The remainder goes to the children. If both are boys, then the total amount is divided between them equally. If they are a boy and a girl, then the boy receives twice as much as the girl who inherits one third while her brother takes two thirds.

The position is different in the case of grand children's claim to a share of their grand father's inheritance in place of their own father. According to the family law of a number of Muslim countries, they inherit on the basis of a rule known as "the compulsory will". These laws of Muslim countries have adopted the views of Imam Ibn Hazm which are not only humanitarian but also have a sound basis. He advocates that in this particular case where a man is survived by his father and children of his own, the grand father is deemed to have made a will in favour of those grand-children of his in the amount which his son i.e. their father, would have inherited from him had he been alive, or one third of the grand-father's property, whichever is the lesser amount. This applies whether the grand-father has actually made such a will or not.

That is the reason for calling this will a compulsory one. Even if no will is written or signed by the grand-father, it is deemed to be there, and the beneficiaries are only his grand-children.

•Fasting and the use of eardrops or eyedrops

Some scholars still suggest that the use of eyedrops or eardrops invalidates fasting, since, they claim, the liquid used will eventually reach the stomach. That is a view which cannot be supported by any clear evidence. While it is understandable that scholars in the past might have made such an argument, before human knowledge of the inside of the human body became accurate, our knowledge shows that this is inaccurate.

Furthermore, what invalidates fasting is eating, drinking and sex. It is not correct to equate eardrops or eyedrops with drinking. Indeed, famous scholars, like Imam Ibn Hazm, state clearly that since no one drinks through his ears or ears, eyedrops and eardrops cannot invalidate fasting. This is, to my mind, the correct view on this point.

•Women adopting the husband's family name

The adoption by a woman of her husband's family name when she marries him is a token of her being subordinate to him. Historically speaking, a woman was in a position of total subordination to her husband.

In Islam, she suffers nothing of the sort. She retains her own family name because she is allowed to act independently of him. If divorce takes place, she returns to her own family. In Western countries, even after divorce, she continues to be known by her husband's family name. This is strange indeed.

•Women - can they take part in politics ? Islamic viewpoint

When we consider the life and needs of any family, it is easy to identify two main tasks which must be properly undertaken and fulfilled. These are the satisfaction of the immediate needs of the members of the family, including the provision of food, water, clothes and accommodation. The other aim is to ensure the continuity of the family which

entails the upbringing of the young generation. It is very difficult to try to state with absolute accuracy that the one task is more important than the other. If we look at the life of a family as a continuing process, not limiting its concern to the immediate but also looking forward to the future, then the needs of tomorrow are just as important as those of today. It may be argued that if we cannot survive today, then tomorrow is of no importance. That is a narrow vision because it seeks to isolate one phase of a continuous process, making the end of this phase an end to the whole process. The point is that if we survive today, then tomorrow is with us before we can realize it. Unless we are prepared for it, we could not know how to use it. Moreover, the needs of today take precedence only in as far as they are more immediate. That does not mean that they are more important, but they are needed earlier.

In a family set up, it is important to assign different tasks to different members, according to their talents and skills. This is the sort of logic which is applied in all walks of life. There is no reason why it should not apply to family life. When we study the nature and temperament, as well as physical strength, susceptibilities and leanings of men and women, we are bound to come to the conclusion that each of them is naturally equipped to fulfil one of the aforementioned tasks. The man can more easily look after the family home and the young generation which ensures the continuity of the family. It is not surprising, therefore, that in all human societies, past and present, men have tended to look after the immediate needs of the family, and provide for its present generation while women look after the young, provide them with care and love which they undoubtedly need. It cannot be said, as some philosophers have tried to argue , that man has been able to subdue the woman with his physical strength and compel her to do the less important tasks which he was unwilling to do. The fact that this has been the chosen order since time immemorial and across continents and civilizations confirms that it is the natural order. Any change would involve reversal of roles. Any society which will attempt that reversal will find out soon enough that it causes itself many more problems than it can cope with.

If we look at life on earth and in the universe, we soon come to the conclusion that there is hardly any redundancy in the system of creation. Every creature and every species has a different role to play. None is created in vain. No two species have exactly the same qualities or tasks. Moreover, in every species the female plays a different role to that of the male. The two roles are usually complementary. All creations have accepted this system and abided by it. None tries to break its smooth, natural working. Only human beings try to advocate that from time to time. Yet the system implies that the roles of men and women are different because they have different characteristics. Otherwise, they would have had to be created in the same mould.

Having said that, I should add that the differences between man and woman are not absolute. Neither are their tasks absolutely clear-cut with inviolable lines of demarcation. Indeed, the tasks are mutually complementary with certain areas in each of them stretching deep into the area of the other. Allah's design is perfect and His creation complete. In life, there are many occasions when either partner is called upon to do partly or wholly the task of the other for a short or long period. There is period of sickness or absence, short or prolonged, and there is premature death of either partner. In any of these cases, one partner may have to fulfil the duties of the other in addition to those of his or her own. Many a young woman faces the prospect of bringing up her family on her own after the death of her husband. In His perfect design of creation, Allah has given us the possibility of tapping additional resources which in the normal course of events we hardly ever use. When we add this inherent flexibility to the fact that Allah has made every individual different from the rest of mankind, we understand the secret of the richness of human life and the great variety of talents, capabilities, skills and characteristics which we exhibit. It is not surprising, therefore, that some women come close to men in their characters, while some men have a good measure of tenderness which characterizes the womenfolk.

All the foregoing support the conclusion that men and women have different roles to play in this life, but these are also made flexible enough to be able to understand each other's role when the need arises. For this reason, Islam stresses the complementarity between the roles of men and women and allows each of them to undertake some of the responsibilities of the other when the need arises.

As far as politics and government are concerned, these relate to meeting the immediate needs of the society. In other words, they are part of looking after the present generation, although by doing so we make it easier for the future generation to fulfil its own needs. Therefore, these are parts of the domain of men. But that does not prevent any woman from taking part in politics. Nor does Islam require Muslim women not to take an active interest in the political affairs of society. Indeed, to care for the affairs of society is required of all Muslims, men and women. Islam considers women equal to men and assigns to them all the rights and privileges which they should enjoy on an equal footing with men. Long before modern societies spoke of the equality between man and woman, Islam established this equality on a sound basis. It allows a woman to own any property and to invest her money in the way she likes and to conduct her business independently of man and to dispense with what she has in the way she thinks fit. It does not stand in her way if she wants to play an active role in the social life of the community, nor does it prevent women from being involved in politics. It does not approve, however, of a woman taking

the leadership of government. In other words, Islam does not allow women to be heads of state, but it allows them to take up any other post in government. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with the lady who has contested the elections for a seat in the council, nor is speaking up on politics denied to women. I do not wish to pass any judgements on those women politicians in Bangladesh and Pakistan, but I am only stating a principle of Islamic legislation. [Added: A woman is not permitted to lead a congregation that has even a single man in it - Also refer the next question.]

•Women in congregation.

Where exactly should the wife stand physically in relation to her husband when they pray in congregation ?

If two women are praying in congregation together, the woman leading the prayer stands a little ahead of the two who must stand to the right of the imam. However, if the congregation is composed of one man and one woman, whether she is his wife or his sister or any other relation to him, she stands behind him, not to his right.

If the congregation is composed of two men and one woman, the imam stands in the front and the other man a little behind and to his right, while the woman stands behind them.

If the congregation is composed of one man, one boy and one woman in addition to the imam, the imam stands in the front and the other man to his right and the boy to his left while the woman stands behind. If the man and the boy stands to the imam's right, that is acceptable. If they stand in a row behind him, the arrangement is appropriate, if the prayer is voluntary, but in obligatory prayer the matter is debatable. However, the woman stands behind them in all situations. If the congregation has several men, boys and women, the front row is for men who are followed by the boys and then by the women. [Added: In no case can a woman ever lead a congregation that has men in it.]

It is strongly discouraged for a woman to stand in a congregational prayer in the same row as men. However, her prayer is not rendered invalid. It is important for her, however, to observe the rules for congregation - as outlined.

•Bank employees - and prayer at Bank's premises -

Some magazine contained an article saying that the fact that a bank pays and receives interest on its loans and deposits makes it forbidden to pray

there. How does a bank employee solve this problem. Some employees offer their prayers at the Bank while others are influenced by the statement that bank is a forbidden place for prayers.

If you are working for a bank which runs its business on usurious basis, then you must try to get yourself moved to a job which does not involve much handling of usurious transactions. There are certain aspects to the work of any bank which may have very little to do with interest or usurious charges. If one does a job of this type, no blame may be attached to him. It is even better to try to find an alternative job, away from a usurious bank. One need not leave his job in the bank until one has another job lined up.

As for prayers within the bank premises, the Prophet says : *"The whole earth has been made a prayer place and a source of purification for me."* That obviously includes his followers in all generations. Every place on earth may be a prayer place for a Muslim. Similarly, every spring of water can be a source of purification. In the absence of water, we may resort to dry ablution (*Tayammum*), which uses clean dust for purification.

What the argument entails is that the actions done in a particular place may render it unfit for prayer. Such a view cannot be given haphazardly. It must be supported by firm evidence. The fact is that only the absence of purity in a particular place renders it unfit for prayer. If some impurity falls on a particular spot, we must not pray in that spot until the impurity has been removed. Here we are speaking of physical impurity. This does not apply to what may be considered mental impurity, such as forbidden practices.

There is no statement in the Qur'an or in the Hadith which suggests that the home or office of a money lender is unfit for prayer. We may have to adopt a certain position towards people who are engaged in forbidden practices, but that is a different matter altogether.

Those who pray in the bank do better because they are keen to offer their prayers on time. To leave obligatory prayers, is certainly wrong.

•Mosques - preference of one over the other.

A group of us were going in a car to a certain mosque. One of us asked to be dropped to another mosque on the way. Another objected and said

that we are not allowed to proceed from one mosque to another. We should all go to the same mosque. The correct status?

If the obligatory prayer is not yet due, but is quite soon, you may drop your friend at the mosque of his choice and proceed to the other mosque if you so prefer. There may be very good reasons for each of you preferring to pray in different mosques, such as each of you choosing the one nearest to his home or place of work. If there is ample time for you to reach from one to the other, then that is perfectly all right.

If the prayer is already called and the congregation in the nearest mosque is just about to start, then it is strongly discouraged to move on to another mosque. That gives the appearance of rejection of a certain congregation, which a Muslim must never do. If there is a good reason for doing so, such as having no parking place near the first mosque, while it is easily available at the other and you are quite sure that you can catch up with the congregation in the more distant mosque, then you may proceed.

•Pilgrimage at other people's expense :

Some government and private institutions and companies sponsor what they call " poor men's pilgrimage." Some of these companies and institutions may pressure their employees to go on such free pilgrimage. Some of these employees may have some other urgent needs, such as serious sickness in the family, the payment of an outstanding debt, the marriage of a daughter, etc. Would it not have been better for the company to help the employee with these needs, instead of sending them on pilgrimage? It is sometimes felt that there is an element of prestige which the company or the institution gains as a result of this exercise. How about helping them offer the Umrah instead of pilgrimage? Does a person who offers pilgrimage in such circumstances fulfil his obligatory pilgrimage, or he will have to offer it again when he is able to undertake the journey on his own resources? If a person who can afford to perform pilgrimage without any financial help from others accepts such an invitation, does it count as the discharge of his obligatory pilgrimage?

As you are all well aware, pilgrimage is a duty incumbent on all Muslims and it must be offered at least once in a lifetime. Therefore, many scholars are of the opinion that once a person is able to make the journey and make the pilgrimage, he must do so without delay. He does not know whether he will live till the following season or not. If he waits he is simply delaying a duty that has become obligatory to him. Furthermore, he may not be able to afford the journey the following year or in a few years time. He would have missed the chance of discharging a very important duty.

As long as one receives his money from a legitimate source, then he can offer the pilgrimage, using that money. It is well known that receiving a gift is a legitimate way of taking money from another person. The Prophet, who was not allowed to take charity from anyone, used to accept gifts. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with accepting a gift which covers the expenses of one's pilgrimage.

It is true that some companies and institutions, as well as governments, invite people to offer the pilgrimage at their own expense. Some companies invite their own employees. They feel that it is a gesture of kindness or appreciation to the employees to be invited to go on pilgrimage. Some of those employees are reluctant to accept such invitation because of reservations of the type mentioned. Therefore, a company may feel that it needs to encourage its employees to accept the invitation. Obviously, no one forces or pressures another into making the journey.

Whether it is better to give the employees money to meet some other needs is a totally irrelevant question. There are numerous methods of earning reward from Allah. We may choose whichever one suits us. Allah says in the Qur'an that no restriction is imposed on people who wish to do an act of kindness. You will find some people providing drinking water to a village or to their neighbours as an oct of charity. Others prefer to offer food, while a different group may give cash. We cannot say to the one who provides drinking water that he should have given the cost in cash to poor people. Moreover, one act of kindness should not be considered in opposition to another. Perhaps those employees who have another urgent need may be able to get help from their companies or institutions if they put their cases to them. Do you find it proper to say to a company that it should not invite some people to pilgrimage in order to help them with the marriage of their daughters? The two things cannot be matched together. Nor is it kind nor polite to suggest that these companies sponsor the pilgrimage of their employees as a matter of prestige. How can one testify to that? We are here running into the dangerous grounds of trying to judge the intentions of other people, when we have nothing to go by except our own knowledge which, by necessity, must be defective. It is Allah alone who knows the

intentions of the people and rewards them for their actions according to His knowledge. If a company sponsors the pilgrimage of its employees, then we should praise that company as one which looks after its employees and its interests. We give them credit for their action as it appears to us, without trying to attribute it to any ulterior or selfish motives. You suggest that Umrah may be offered instead of pilgrimage in such cases. 'May I ask : in what cases? How do you feel if you invite a person to dinner and he says to you : I will only have a cup of tea or an orange juice. As you realize, the difference between Umrah and pilgrimage is great indeed. Although both are duties of Islam, the effort and expense needed for the one are no match at all to those of the other. Or do you mean that the company should offer Umrah to those of its employees who have other needs and offer them cash to meet such needs? That brings us back to the earlier point of imposing restrictions on kindness. That is not acceptable.

When a person offers the pilgrimage and he or she is an adult, sane Muslim, he or she has discharged the duty of pilgrimage, and any subsequent pilgrimage counts as a voluntary one. Whether he meets the expenses himself or someone else foots the bill is irrelevant. Even if he is very rich and he receives an invitation to offer pilgrimage, which he duly accepts, then his duty of pilgrimage has been discharged. He does not need to do it again.

People in our part of the world describe pilgrimage as an invitation by Allah. That is an appropriate description, since we travel for pilgrimage to visit the Sacred House of Allah. We do not go there unless we are admitted by Him. Sometimes, He invites us and requires us to pay our own expenses. At other times, He facilitates for us the invitation allowing others to pay our expenses. We should not refuse. Indeed, when we accept His kindness we are doing what is appropriate.

The pilgrimage is valid in every sense of the word. Therefore, no repeat is required, unless we wish to voluntarily offer a second or a third pilgrimage.

•Umrah in Ramadan - fasting during travel

If I am traveling to Makkah for Umrah in the month of Ramadan, should I continue fasting or not?

The Umrah has nothing to do with fasting in Ramadan. These are two separate considerations. Any travel in Ramadan allows a person to avail himself of the concession given by Allah not to observe the fast. He or she compensates for not fasting by fasting a

similar number or days to those on which he did not fast in Ramadan, once he is back from his travel. That the travel is undertaken to perform Umrah does not restrict that concession in any way.

Perhaps it should be pointed out that the concessions not to fast when one is traveling allows a person to choose whether to fast or not to fast. It is authentically reported that the Prophet traveled with a number of his companions in Ramadan. Some of them continued to fast while others availed themselves of the concession and did not fast. Neither group reproached the other for its choice. If you feel like fasting on such a journey and you are confident that fasting will not impose a too heavy burden on you, you may go on and fast. If you choose to avail yourself of the concession, you are perfectly entitled to do so.

•Throwing stones at the Jamrah - stoning in the wrong order

You should be beginning stoning with the First Jamrah, or the "small" one, as it is commonly called. When you have completed this stoning, you move on to the second, or the Middle Jamrah. You finish with the third or the "Grand" Jamrah, which is also known as the Jamrah of Aqabah. This is the proper order for stoning on the second, third and fourth days. On the first day, you do the stoning only at the third or Grand Jamrah.

If, however, you do the stoning in the wrong order, beginning with the third and moving on to the middle one before finishing the Third Jamrah, only the last one is correct. The other two are invalid. You have to go back to them and do the stoning in the right order, as long as this happens before sunset on the 13th Zul Hijjah. If one has done the stoning in the wrong order on all the three days, then he has to compensate for this because his stoning remains incomplete. If he has done it on one day only, then the compensation may be in the form of a sadaqah, or a charitable offering.

•Monthly menstruation period, its duration and other continuous bleeding

There is no set limit for menstruation which applies to all women. As you may realize, this is something that relates to the physical constitution of every woman. Hence, there is a wide range of variation between women, although the overwhelming majority continues in menstruation for seven days. Many women finish their periods after six days, while others may go on to the eighth day before they are finally clean. A few may have longer or shorter periods.

Although most women have a regular period, which comes every 28-30 days, some are not so regular. Therefore, there is no maximum limit for the length of time of cleanliness from menstruation. On the other hand, some scholars say that the longest that a menstruation period can take is 10 days. The weightier opinion is that there is no such limit. Every woman knows her normal course and she acts accordingly.

Sometimes, a woman continues to discharge blood after the end of her menstrual period. The discharge may continue week after week. She has to differentiate between menstruation and a normal blood discharge. The two are different. During her menstruation, a woman may not pray, fast or have sexual intercourse with her husband. The case is different when she has a blood discharge. What a woman should do if she has such a discharge is to calculate her menstruation period on the basis of its normal length, and she takes a bath and pays no attention to the discharge apart from taking the normal precautions not to allow the blood to fall on her clothes or body. Umm Salamah, the wife of the Prophet, asked him about a woman who continues to bleed. He said : "Let her calculate the nights and the days which she used to menstruate every month. She should not pray during these days. Thereafter, she takes a bath, uses a piece of cotton or cloth (to absorb bleeding) and prays." (Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others).
The case is known in the books of fiqh as " estihadhah ", which is different from menstruation which means "haith."

•Fasting - and use of miswak or brushing teeth during fasting

A miswak is a short stick which is taken from the branches of a particular tree, known as 'araak'. When the outer skin is removed it can be used as a toothbrush. Normally it is used without any toothpaste. It apparently has good cleansing effects on the teeth. The use of such a miswak is recommended during ablution and before prayer.

To use a miswak or a toothbrush when one is fasting is permissible. However, when one uses toothpaste, one puts oneself unnecessarily in a position which could spoil one's fasting. When one rinses his mouth, he needs to do that thoroughly, not as he does normally in ablution. Therefore, there is really a danger of swallowing something involuntarily. That is enough to render his fasting invalid for the day. From another point of view, it is discouraged to use a miswak or toothbrush after midday on any fasting day. The Prophet mentions that the smell of the mouth of a person who is fasting is "better, in Allah's view, than the smell of musk." When he uses a miswak or a toothbrush, he spoils that smell. This is the reason why it is discouraged. But it does not invalidate his fasting if

he does not swallow anything of the water with which he rinses his mouth or washes out the toothpaste.

•Hoarding money - amassing of wealth

Surah 'TAUBA' -

" As for those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend the same in the service of Allah's cause, giving them the tidings of painful sufferings. A day will certainly come when these shall be heated up in the fire of hell and their foreheads, sides and backs shall be branded with them. They will be told : "This is what you have stored up for yourselves; taste, then, what you have hoarded."(9; 35-36)

There is no doubt that Islam does not like the amassing of wealth or using it solely for one's enjoyment or for leading a luxurious life. Indeed, all Islamic legislation in matters of finance are geared towards a fair distribution of wealth. There is no virtue, from the Islamic point of view, in the amassing of great wealth and passing it on from father to son in order to perpetuate a family's strong financial position in society. In the past, it was traditional in certain societies that the eldest son of a family was the single heir of all its wealth. Other children received only what their father assigned to them, if any. It is still the case in most non-Muslim societies that a man is free to bequeath by will whatever portion of his wealth to whomever he chooses. Islam, on the other hand, has a fine and detailed system of inheritance which ensures the division of the father's wealth fairly among his heirs. None of the heirs may receive anything above the share.

What the Qur'anic verse speaks about and warns against is the hoarding up of gold and silver, or money in general. Therefore, it is extremely important to know what is meant by "hoarding" in order to avoid the fate of woeful suffering which this verse speaks of. Within this text, the question arises whether being rich is permissible in Islam or not. There is nothing in Qur'anic verse which can be construed as forbidding the ownership of much money, or, more plainly, being rich. Some of the Prophet's companions were rich and we do not find any Hadith which tells them to get rid of their riches. Indeed, the Prophet received donations from such people and thanked them for their generosity. The clearest example is that of Usman who was one of the wealthiest people in Arabia. At the time when the Prophet called on his companions to donate generously for the mobilization of an army to fight Byzantine Empire, Usman came up with a donation which pleased the Prophet immensely. The Prophet was speaking on the pulpit when Usman offered one hundred horses with all the equipment necessary for a horseman to have on such a

campaign. The Prophet accepted and prayed for Usman. As the Prophet went one step down, Usman told him that he was donating another one hundred equipped horses. The Prophet again prayed for him and went another step down. At this point, Usman increased his donation to three hundred horses. The Prophet stopped and signed with his finger to the right and left and prayed for Usman and said his famous statement : "Nothing that Usman may do in future will harm him." This means that Usman would be forgiven any slip or mistake that he might do subsequent to such a great donation which amounted to the equipment of full army by the standards of the time. There were other companions of the Prophet who were rich indeed, notably, Abdul Rahman Ibn Auf, who was one of the ten companions of the Prophet given the happiest news of all : certain admission to heaven.

There is nothing wrong from the Islamic point of view in being rich, provided that one makes the right use of one's riches. Furthermore, to be rich is not synonymous with hoarding up of money, whether it is for the modern currency type or silver and gold. The two are different. What does, then, constitute hoarding? According to eminent scholars and commentators of the Qur'an, the payment of zakah makes all the difference. If one pays the zakah of his wealth on time, this payment serves as purification of the money and ensures that he is not included among those threatened by this verse. Al-Bukhari relates on the authority of Abdullah Ibn Umar that "this warning was applicable before legislation of zakah. When zakah was made a duty, Allah made it serve as purification of money." Abdullah Ibn Umar is further reported to have said : "The wealth from which zakah is paid is not hoarded, even if it is stored under seven layers of earth. What is in a person's hands is hoarded if he does not pay zakah for it." It is certainly the case that zakah is spent to serve the cause of Allah. This is true when zakah is paid to the poor and the needy, or to any other class of beneficiaries, not merely when it is paid to finance a campaign of jihad.

•Company loan - and pilgrimage with loan outstanding.

If the Company gives loans for buying a car, it suggests that they they are pleased with your work and intend to retain you for a long time to come. That will make it easy for you to settle the loan by monthly instalments. Moreover, if something should happen to you, the company may take the car and sell it in order to get back the amount it had loaned. The company must consider that the car represents more than sufficient collateral to ensure the payment of their loan. It is perhaps worthwhile to explain an important point about pilgrimage and debt. When a person has incurred a debt, and he needs some time before being able to settle it, he does not fulfil the conditions which make him "able" to do the

pilgrimage. In other words, he is not required to do it, since pilgrimage is a duty incumbent on those who are able to undertake the journey. I have already explained that by ability, most scholars mean health and financial ability, as well as the absence of any physical hindrance to prevent from taking the journey. The condition of financial ability is not met by anyone who has a loan to pay. Therefore, he is not required to fulfil the duty of pilgrimage until he has repaid the loan.

•Congregation - late joining

I went late into the mosque for Friday prayer. The congregation had started. I joined them, but I soon realized they had already finished the major part of the prayer. When I stand up for completing my prayer, how many rak'ahs should I offer?

When you join a congregation which has already started, a rak'ah is counted complete for you if you join before the imam stands up after bowing i.e. rukoo'. If you join immediately after rukoo', then that rak'ah is not counted for you. It is preferable, however, to join it even with the parts which will not be counted.

For joining Friday prayer with the imam, you must at least catch up with one full rak'ah of it. In other words, you must join before the imam has raised his head after rukoo' of the second rak'ah. If you join him after that, i.e. having missed both rak'ahs with him, then you offer four rak'ahs after he has finished. These four rak'ahs are counted as Dhuhr prayer, which becomes obligatory if you have missed Friday prayer.

•Family arrangements of a 'house' - zakah liability :

A few years ago I bought a house and registered it in my wife's name for the simple reason that I want her to be independent when I die. As we are living in Saudi Arabia, I have made arrangements to let it. I paid about about 60 percent of the rental on renovation, repairs and other maintenance work. I also paid about 25 percent in taxes and zakah. What i would like to know is whether I must treat this house as a gift to my wife and let her have its rental, or should I continue with the present

arrangement. There is no argument between us on this subject, and I wish to know my obligations as defined by Islam.

What we have to realize when it comes to an arrangement like this is that Islamic duties apply to a man and his wife separately. Either of them may be liable to zakah or may be exempt from it on the basis of how much each of them owns and whether either of them has more than the threshold of zakah or not. There may be a great deal of difference in how much you have to pay out in zakah if you consider this house to be your own, although it is registered in your wife's name. In this case, you have to add the rental to your other possessions and pay zakah for the full amount. On the other hand, if you consider it to be your wife's property, she may be liable to pay zakah and the rental may not exceed the threshold below which no zakah is payable. If both of you are liable to pay zakah, there will be no difference in the amount you will have to pay at the end. I am sure, however, that this is not your main consideration, but I am pointing it out for the benefit of other readers.

I realize that relations between man and wife may be so close to allow each of them to look at what is owned by the other as joint property. That should not make them lose sight of the fact that they should discharge their Islamic duties as individuals. Therefore, when it comes to the payment of zakah, each of them has to assess his or her liability on the basis of what each of them owns. If we were to suppose that this house you have mentioned was inherited by your wife at the death of one of her relatives, and you have done all the arrangements you have mentioned, the zakah payable on its rental should be calculated on the basis of what your wife owns. Since the case is as you have described, only you and your wife can determine who of you should receive the rental and pay the zakah. As far as your arrangements are concerned, there is no question that they are valid. Many a thoughtful husband takes similar steps to ensure that his wife continues to enjoy decent and respectable living after his death. Many a wife and a mother will find herself in a very difficult position if she has to work in order to earn her living, after her husband has died. She may be unable to work after having spent most of her life looking after her family.

However, when it comes to arrangements of this sort, family considerations may take precedence over legal ones. Your actions so far have been those of a person making every decision on how to utilize a piece of property of his own. That is all right if it is agreed between yourself and your wife. Since you have made her the gift already and you have told her that the house is, from the moment of purchase, her own, then that is how it should remain. The rental is hers. She may be willing to let you have it all and spend it the way you like, since you will be looking after your family. But then you must not forget that

what you get of rental is hers. On the other hand, it may be understood between your wife and yourself that the house will be hers after your death, but for all practical purposes it remains yours as long as you are alive. In that case, you are treading on slippery grounds. What is the difference between this arrangement and that of assigning the house by will to your wife? For practical purposes, there is no difference. You should not forget that you cannot do that in Islam. Your wife is entitled to have a fixed share of what you leave behind. If you have children, she receives one eighth of your property, after the payment of any debts you may have outstanding and the execution of any will you may have made. If you have no children, she inherits one quarter. You cannot add to that share this house of yours.

If you truly mean the house to be hers, then she should be the one to receive the rental. After that, she may, at her own free will, make a gift of the whole or part of that rental to you. She may spend it on the family, if she so desires. What is important is to show that we are serious when it comes to financial transactions so that everyone knows his or her rights and obligations. You cannot just tell your wife, " I am giving you this house, " and then treat it for all intents and purposes as your own. That sort of attitude should come as the result of a decision made freely by your wife. She may tell you that she is making a certain gift to you which may be the rental of the house of its usage. But this has to be her own free decision. If she decides to make such a gift to you, you may benefit by it as you like. Whatever you and your wife decide in this case, you have to treat every step seriously and take your decisions wisely. It is wrong to take things for granted and behave as if you can make her a nominal gift and continue to treat it as your own.

•Qualifications to benefit by zakah -

You have mentioned on more than one occasion that zakah money may be paid only to eight classes of people in which you included the poor, the needy and those whose hearts are to be won over. Could you please explain what is meant by these three classes. How to differentiate the needy from the poor? Is it permissible to pay zakah money to people who wish to embrace Islam in order to encourage them to take that step?

Let me begin by giving a translation of the verse which enumerates the eight classes who may benefit by zakah. It may be rendered in English as follows : " *Alms may be given only to the poor, the needy, officers in charge of zakah, those whose hearts are to be won over, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage, and for those who are*

overburdened with debts, and for the struggle in Allah's cause, and for (stranded) wayfarers. This is an ordinance from Allah; and Allah is all-knowing, wise." (9; 60).

Scholars differ as to whether "the poor and the needy" are one class or two different classes of people. They also differ as to who is worse off: the poor or the needy? It is beyond the scope of this column to go into the details of these differences. It is sufficient to say tnat all sorts of poverty and all its degrees qualify the poor to benefit from zakah. The operative criterion which determines poverty is not how little a man has, but whether he has enough or not. If a person has an income from his work or from a pension or a building he lets out, but the income does not satisfy his own and his family's needs, then he qualifies as a poor person who is entitled to receive zakah. Basic needs include food and clothes for the person and his family as well as reasonable accommodation and furniture and the necessary tools for his trade and means of transport.

In order to know for certain who qualifies to benefit from zakah under these two headings, it is useful to throw some light on the opposite state of being "rich."
Scholars agree on the meaning of richness which makes one liable to pay out zakah. This sort of richness means that one owns a certain minimum of money in certain conditions. According to the Maliki and El-Shaf'ie and the Hanbali schools of thought, richness means owning what is enough for one's needs. He who does not need extra money to provide for his basic needs cannot be entitled to zakah, even if he does not own anything. Conversely, if he is in need, then he qualifies as poor or needy, even if he owns what may be considered a fair amount of money by many people. Imam El-Shaf'ie says : "A man may be rich if he owns only one dirham (the smallest currency unit at the time) and is able to earn, while another may have one thousand dirhams but may still be considered poor if he is unable to earn or if he has too many dependants." Thus, poverty means being in need while richness is the opposite case.

It may be asked whether zakah money may be paid to someone who is able to work but prefers not to do so, because he feels that without work he may claim zakah. The answer, according to most schools of thought is that such a person cannot claim zakah and may not be paid any zakah money which is apportioned to the poor and needy. The prophet states very clearly : "Zakah may not be paid to anyone who is rich or to anyone who is strong and healthy." This pronouncement is restricted by another condition which is that the strong and healthy should also have a job to earn his living. If he cannot find work, then he may be paid from zakah, or, better still, he should be helped to find work.

Muslim scholars have also specified that if a person who is able to work decides to spend all his time in worship, praying for much of the time and fasting as many days as he can,

then he may not be paid from zakah. We are told clearly that to work in order to earn one's living is far better, in Allah's view, than voluntary worship, provided that one does not contravene the bounds of religion in his work. Islam does not approve of this type of full-time worship if it means that one becomes a burden to society or to others.

On the other hand, if one seeks better education and cannot combine this with working for his living, then he may be paid from zakah what is enough for his needs until he finishes his studies. Such a student is given from zakah because the benefit of his education is not restricted to himself. The whole society benefits from it.

People "whose hearts are to be won over" may be divided into several groups :

1. A person who, if given from zakah. may become a Muslim or may persuade his people to become Muslims.

2. A person who is hostile to Islam but, if given from zakah, he and others with him may keep quiet.

3. A newcomer to Islam, even if he is rich. The point here is that a newcomer may find certain difficulties. His family or his people may turn against him, and he may lose his job, or he may encounter other types of opposition. Financial assistance in such cases may go a long way to reassure him that he has made the right decision.

4. Some of the leading figures among the non-Muslims may be given from zakah in order to encourage others like them to become Muslims.

5. People who live in the border areas may also be given from zakah in order to encourage them to defend the borders, in case they are attacked by non-Muslims.

Some scholars, including Imam El-Shaf'ie, are of the opinion that this class of people does not include non-Muslims. Other eminent scholars say that this class of people includes Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Quite a few scholars, over the ages, have been of the opinion that there is no longer any need to win over the heart of anyone. They argue that since Islam has established itself as a strong, firmly rooted religion, there is no longer any need to spend zakah money in order to make some people sympathetic to Islam. Other scholars who have a different view argue that the need to win the sympathy of certain

people can be assessed at any particular time. It does not follow that there will always be such people to win over. This need varies according to the situation of the Muslim community.

It is up to a Muslim ruler to decide, in his discretion, whether to utilize part of the zakah money in order to win over certain people. It is up to him also to decide not to give such money to any people who used to receive it under his predecessor. Zakah is paid to those of its beneficiaries who exist at any particular time. If one or more of the eight classes of beneficiaries does not exist at any particular time, then its share is not paid out. Withholding it does not constitute an invalidation of Allah's ruling.

Indeed the need to win certain people over to Islam does not cease. Some scholars of the Maliki school of thought argue that such people are not given zakah money in order that they will help us, but to make Islam acceptable to them so that we help them save themselves. In other words, this is one of the means of calling people to Islam.

Imam Al-Tabari points out that there are two reasons for paying out zakah. One is to remove a certain weakness of a Muslim and the other is to strengthen Islam. if zakah is paid for the latter purpose then it may be paid to rich and poor people alike. The recipients here are not given zakah money because they need it but because Islam needs their help.It is needless to say that only a Muslim ruler may decide to pay zakah money to this class of people. Such decision relates to the internal and the external policy of the Muslim state. It is possible, however, that an Islamic organization takes over such a responsibility in a situation where the government does not care about zakah or about Islam generally.

•Repeated pilgrimage, repeated sins :

The main and clear aspect of pilgrimage is that we hasten to respond to Allah's call, wearing nothing of the ornaments which are part of our custom. When we feel our dedication in this way and when our submission is truly genuine, Allah rewards us generously for our pilgrimage. He wipes off our sins. When we have finished, we start with our slate clean. We know that when we committed those sins, we wronged ourselves and we disregarded our duty to obey Allah. When we respond to Him with dedication and submission as we do in pilgrimage, He accepts our submissions and erases our past sins.

This is confirmed by numerous Hadiths. The Prophet is quoted to have said: "The only proper reward for pilgrimage offered with dedication is paradise." He also says that every

time we do the Umrah, we have our sins which we have committed since our last Umrah, forgiven. There is no doubt that forgiveness is the reward Allah has promised for those who offer the pilgrimage and the Umrah to emphasize their submission to Allah.

This is not surprising because Allah forgives anyone who turns to Him in genuine repentance, even when the sins he had committed are grave indeed. The Prophet is reported to have said : "A person who repents having committed his sins is like one who has committed no sins." Every time we turn to Allah in repentance, He turns to us with forgiveness.

But the stress is always on our attitude being genuine. Our dedication must be complete; our submission must be total; our repentance should be sincere. A person who declares that he has repented having done a particular sin, while at the same time he knows that if a chance offers itself again, he will not hesitate to do the same sin again, will not be forgiven that sin. His repentance is merely verbal. He does not mean it because a good believer always regards his sins as something totally undesirable, even though at the time of committing them, he might have enjoyed them. People commit adultery or fornication in order to satisfy their desires. This indulgence may provide them, at the time of committing these actions, with pleasure, enjoyment and ecstasy. However, when they reflect on what they have done, they are genuinely sorry for having exceeded the limits set by Allah. That genuine regret, combined with a prayer for forgiveness, ensures that Allah looks compassionately on us and forgives us that sin. Pilgrimage is the greatest act through which we demonstrate our submission to Allah, regret for having committed sins of any sort and type, and resolve to do better in our future days. Therefore, the reward for pilgrimage is total forgiveness and heaven.

But the Prophet speaks of a pilgrimage offered with total dedication. That involves a firm resolve to abide by Islamic rules and teachings. We cannot just say to Allah that we are responding to His call and we are certainly sorry for our past mistakes, but this is merely for the present. As for tomorrow, we go back to the same old practices. This is no demonstration of our submission to Allah. It does not show that we have really repented what we did in the past. On the contrary, it shows that we still do not have the necessary respect for Allah's teachings. How can that be rewarded with forgiveness?

Such an attitude is similar to that of a person, having committed a sin, that he is sorry for it but will go back to it the next minute, if the chance offers itself. This is playing games with the great concept of repentance and forgiveness. Allah accepts no such verbal declarations, because they are devoid of any real substance.

Having said that, I must explain that what counts is ones feelings at the time when one declares one's repentance. If at that particular moment a person is genuine in his repentance, then he is forgiven his past sins. If nevertheless he commits the same sin later because he is too weak to resist the temptation, his weakness is not taken against him except in as far as the new sin is recorded against him. That is because at the time when he declared his repentance, he was sincere. This is indeed a mark of Allah's grace which He bestows on us in abundance. He knows beforehand that we will be going back to our sins, but He also knows that at the time we declare our repentance, we are genuine. He, therefore, accepts our genuineness and responds to it accordingly.

When He forgives us something, He does not record it against us again. A person may commit the same sin many times, but if he genuinely repents it every time he commits it, then he is forgiven that sin every time. Eventually, he is surely to acquire the necessary resolve and strength to be able to resist any temptation.

If the attitude is one of playing games, thinking that one can commit all the sins one wants and then have slate wiped clean because one offers Umrah or pilgrimage, then the attitude is one of carelessness and disregard to Allah's teachings. It is very doubtful that Allah will accept such an act of worship in which one declares repentance when one has not actually repented. The fact that one intends to go back to it shows that the repentance is only verbal. The Umrah and the pilgrimage cannot be approached in such a casual manner. They are very serious acts of worship, the importance of which cannot be over-emphasized. A casual attitude cannot earn Allah's forgiveness. It is imperative to resolve to make a clean break with the past and make the act of worship a genuine beginning of a life of obedience to Allah and proper observance of His commandments.

•Wife's Haj - an obligation for husband?

Is it obligatory for a husband who has enough financial resources to take his wife to pilgrimage? Does the sound financial position of a man make pilgrimage obligatory for his wife, or is it necessary for her to have her own money in order to discharge her pilgrimage duty?

It is important to remember that pilgrimage is like all other Islamic duties. They are imposed on every individual, man or woman, in the same degree. When we stand before Allah on the day of judgement, and our deeds are reckoned for or against us, and our destiny is determined on the basis of what we had done in this life, every one of us stands as an

individual. The fate of any one of us is never determined by what someone else has done for him or her. Nor is the forgiveness of any person withheld as a result of someone else's failure to do what he is required to do for that person. Pilgrimage is a duty required of every Muslim man or woman. But it does not become a binding duty until a person is able to undertake the journey, from every point of view. That ability includes having enough funds, transport, safety during travel, etc. It also includes in the case of a woman having a male companion who is closely related to her and who is known as "mahram." When the conditions of ability are not met in the case of any particular person, that person is not required to do the pilgrimage as a duty.

The same applies in the case of a married woman. The conditions of ability must be met by her, not her husband. Therefore, if she does not have enough funds to undertake the pilgrimage, she is not required to go on pilgrimage as a duty. This is true even if her husband is one of the richest people. Some people may be stingy, even when they are rich. If we were to consider that pilgrimage becomes a duty to a woman simply because her husband can afford to give her what is enough for her trip, what would she do if he does not readily come out with the money? Islam does not require her to implore her husband to take her to pilgrimage or to provide her expenses.

Further than that, a woman must not travel without being accompanied by a mahram, who is her husband or a close relative who she can never marry, such as her father, brother, nephew, etc. If she is taking someone with her as mahram, she is required to pay his expenses. Therefore, if she has sufficient funds for her own journey and expenses, but she does not have an extra amount to cover the expenses of her mahram, she is deemed not to be able to undertake her trip. Obviously, it is possible that one of her mahrams may be going on pilgrimage himself. She may accompany him without having to pay his expenses.

Having said that, I am only stating the rules. It is needless to say that a husband who takes his wife to pilgrimage, paying all her expenses, does something which is highly rewarding in more senses than one. His wife will be ever grateful to him for enabling her to go on this trip which ensures her forgiveness by Allah for all her past sins. She feels that her husband is closer to her than ever before. If they share this experience together, they will always have something enjoyable and much more for every riyal he spends on the pilgrimage of his wife. Muslims have realized this ever since the time of the Prophet. It is gratifying to see the majority of Muslim men always willing to take their wives to pilgrimage, whenever they can afford that.

•" Hajj *Akbar* " or the "grand" pilgrimage :

Is there any special pilgrimage described as " grand " or " hajj akbar "? If so, when does it fall?

No, there is nothing called grand pilgrimage There is a mistaken notion that if the day of Arafat happens to be on Friday, then that pilgrimage is grand and it is rewarded as seven times the reward of ordinary pilgrimage. As I say, this notion is completely mistaken. The mistake comes from misinterpreting a phrase which occurs at the beginning of surah 9, entitled "*Tauba*" (repentance). That verse speaks of a declaration which the Prophet was ordered to make to people on the "grand day of pilgrimage." Some people misinterpret it as "on the day of grand pilgrimage." The grand day of pilgrimage is said by some scholars to be the day of Arafat, while other scholars consider it to be the following day, i.e. the day of Eid, when the pilgrims have to do several duties.

•Reading Qur'an without ablution and purification

Can a woman read, or even touch the Quraan when she is in periods - or can she recite from memory or use a bead for glorifying Allah?

It is unanimously agreed by scholars that ablution *(or wudhu)*, is strongly recommended for everyone who intends to recite the Qur'an, whether from memory or from a book, or wants to glorify Allah or praise Him. Some scholars say that if one intends to hold the Qur'an in his hand and read it, then it is required to do the ablution first. However, the evidence they use to support their opinion is not decisive in making ablution a condition for holding the Qur'an or reading it. Therefore, it is perhaps more correct to say that while ablution is not absolutely necessary when doing either of these two things, it is strongly recommended.

A woman in her menstruation and a man in the state of ceremonial impurity, cannot recite the Qur'an, whether from memory or from a book until they have removed that state by taking a bath. The woman must end her menstruation before she is able to do that. However, if some verses of the Qur'an are written in a book or a piece of paper, together with other material, then it is permissible for a woman in her menstruation or a man in a state of ceremonial impurity to hold that piece of paper without having to take a bath first. The Prophet wrote a letter to the Byzantine emperor and included in that verses from the Qur'an. The emperor was non-Muslim and the Prophet knew that he will be holding that

paper in his hand. It is assumed that a non-Muslim does not take the same precautions as a Muslim to remove the state of impurity.

Similarly, glorifying Allah by using phrases like " *Subhan Allah* ", " *Alhamdulillah* " and similar words and phrases is permissible. A bead has no sanctity, nor indeed is it recommended. The Prophet used no such beads, but he counted the number of times he glorified Allah by using his fingers.

•Unacceptable second marriage.

Can a man marry a second wife in order to punish his first wife for her disobedience and failure to fulfil her duties towards him ?

Islam provides a system which regulates family life as well as the life of the community as a whole. In every respect of its legislation and in its regulation of relations between various groups and individuals in society, Islam maintains justice, fair treatment and a balance between rights and responsibilities. In this way it provides a sold basis for a strong, closely knit community.

Within the family, Islam has established certain rules and distributed responsibilities to each of the two partners, adding commensurate rights which should be observed and fulfilled by both of them. A woman should obey her husband as long as he does not tell her to do something which is unlawful, from the Islamic point of view. In return, she is to be treated with respect and kindness and to be well looked after so that she has no worries about her own or her children's needs.

Because the woman is the weaker partner in the family relationship, Islam places strong emphasis on the importance of being fair to women, and not to abuse them in any way. The Prophet describes those who are kind and good to their wives as the best of people. He says : "The best among you are those who are best to your households; I am the best among you to my house-hold." This is a clear statement which encourages every kindness toward one's wife and children. Such a kindness is certainly a measure of good character. It is also the gauge for a happy family life. There is no doubt that by the way a man treats his wife and the care and kindness he shows her, he sets the pattern of life in the family home. If he is kind, good and caring, mutual affection and happiness will be well established. If he is quarrelsome, unkind and dictatorial, his life at home will be beset with problems. While a woman can influence the pattern of life at home to a large extent, there is no doubt that the ultimate responsibility for the happiness of the family lies with the man.

When we say this, we are certainly speaking in a general manner. Families differ as much as individuals differ in their habits, temperaments, cares and prejudices. Moreover, they differ according to the degree of compatibility between man and wife. Everyone of us requires certain qualities in his or her life partner. It is no exaggeration to say that none of us finds in the other the ideal partner that he or she has imagined before marriage. There is always need to compromise. That need continues with us through life and the more ready we are to make such compromises, the happier we become. It is perhaps with an eye to this need that one of the final commandments of the Prophet was concerned with the treatment of wives and women generally. On his deathbed, the Prophet continued to remind the followers of three areas as needing continuous attention. The first concerns man's relationship with Allah while the other two are concerned with human relations, concentrating on the need to protect the rights of two vulnerable groups in society, namely, women and slaves. He said repeatedly : "Attend to your prayers. Do not ask those whom your right hands possess to accomplish for you what they cannot do. Fear Allah in your treatment of women."

With such emphasis on the rights of women and the need to extend to them the proper and kind treatment they expect and deserve, every Muslim must do his best to ensure that in his treatment of his wife and the rest of his household, he provides an example to be followed by others. We all know that Islamic society is compassionate and caring. These characteristics start in the family home and with every member of the family extending them to the others, according to each one's responsibilities and duties.

On the basis of the foregoing principles, we look at the question posed by our reader. It is well known that Islam allows a man to marry up to four wives at any one time. Furthermore, Islam allows divorce. In each of these two cases of polygamy, there are rights which belong to the husband and each of his wives.

A man may marry a second wife for any one or a number of reasons. These, however, do not include punishing his first wife for her nonfulfillment of her duties towards him. She may be disobedient and totally undutiful. Her behaviour may leave much to be desired. The proper way to correct such a situation is not by marrying a second wife. It is true that such a marriage may jolt her violently and she may correct her attitude towards her husband. But then, that is not the primary consideration in such an equation. We have to begin with the second wife who is being used as a means of punishment or retaliation in a situation in which she remains not involved up to the point of her marriage. When she accepts to marry her husband, she may be totally unaware of his intentions and the general situation which exists in his home and the relationship between him and his first wife. On the other hand, she may be given a highly false impression of that situation. What

will happen next is, in most cases, a continuing rivalry, fed up by jealousy, between the two women, until one is finally able to win a special position of favour with the husband who may, in turn, suffer as a result of this rivalry. In such a situation, the making of a good family home is totally lacking. The real sufferers, at the end of the day, are the children of either one or both of the two women.

If the second marriage is intended as punishment for the first wife, is it not appropriate to ask : what happens if the punishment works and the first wife becomes obedient, loving and caring? Will the husband in this case divorce the second wife, as the role which she was brought in to play has been fulfilled? If the answer is in the affirmative and that a divorce will take place, then the whole affair is absurd. It involves an exploitation of a human being, the second wife, to remedy a situation which is neither of her making nor of her concern. Nor has she been told that her role will be over when the punishment proves to be effective. Moreover, by that time, children may have been born to the second wife and they have rights to claim against their father.

If the answer to the above question is that no divorce will take place and the second marriage is permanent, as every marriage should be, then the husband is guilty of playing games with the interests of the family as a whole. This is something which Islam does not accept at all. Islam views marriage very seriously and emphasizes that all rights of all partners must be honoured and strictly observed.

To sum up, the second marriage while retaining the first wife is allowed in Islam for any of the good reasons for which such a concession has been allowed us by Allah. The duties of husband and wife must be fulfilled, as they are commensurate with their rights. A wife obeys her husband and looks after her. Both care for each other and respect and honour each other. A second marriage contracted with the aim of punishing the first wife for her lack of observance of her duties towards her husband cannot be approved because it involves unfairness to others. Moreover, it betrays an unacceptable attitude to marriage as a whole, which Islam views very seriously.

•Pledges (made to Allah) and intentions.

It is a practice that people make a solemn intention that they will do this or that if certain wishes of theirs are granted by Allah. Is this permissible in the first place? If so, how does it vary from asking Allah to fulfil for us

certain favours, without making such a pledge? What sort of pledges are preferred?

A pledge of the type you describe is known in Islamic technology as "nathr". That is different from "Niyyah," which means intention. Nathr is a pledge. You express in words your resolve that you will fulfil or do something, such as fasting any number of days, or giving to the poor certain amount of money, or offering three hours of night worship, etc. Here you are committing yourself to doing any of these action upon the fulfillment of a certain wish you have in mind. Niyyah, as it is used in Arabic, is making up one's mind to do something, whether that is dependent on the fulfillment of something else or not. It has a much wider usage and it applies to everything. That is what is meant by the Hadith which states "actions are but by intentions." It means that the value of a certain action we do is determined by the intention behind it. If someone attends congregational prayer in the mosque regularly in order to give the neighbourhood a certain impression of himself, his action is not as another who attends congregational prayer less frequently but has no aim behind it other than obeying Allah and His messenger.

There is another difference between a pledge, or nathr, and an intention, or niyyah. A pledge must be fulfilled once it is made. It becomes a debt owed to Allah by the person who has pledged it. If you do not fulfil it, you will be questioned by Allah about it. The reason is that you have volunteered such a pledge and this cannot be done in jest.

Therefore, fulfillment is required as a duty. An intention is different in the sense that if you do not fulfil it, you are not held to account for that. If it is a good action that you have intended, you are awarded for carrying it out. If you do not do it, you lose that reward but you incur no sin.

People make such pledges because they believe that by making them, they stand a better chance of having their wishes fulfilled. That is not true. Making a pledge to fast, or pray, or do whatever, does not get them any nearer to having their wishes fulfilled. Allah does not need our worship so that He fulfil our wishes if we offer more worship to Him. It is far better to pray Allah to grant us whatever wishes we want to be accomplished, provided that they are not sinful.

We should remember that He can grant us whatever wish we may have. His bounty is without limits. When we implore Him confirming our obedience to Him and submission to His will, He answers our prayer. Then, when our wishes are fulfilled, we express our gratitude to Him by voluntarily doing what he likes us to do. We can prostrate ourselves

before Him in gratitude, and that is known as a "sajdah of thanks," (or "*Sajdae shukr*") or we can give something to charity or fast, or do similar actions of worship.

•Voluntary prayer before Maghrib.

Is voluntary prayer permitted before Maghrib? How about the prayer known as greeting to the mosque, if we enter a mosque at a Maghrib time?

To offer a voluntary prayer at the time when the sun is setting is discouraged. But Maghrib does not fall due until the sun has set. Therefore, there is no objection to offering voluntary prayer after Maghrib falls due. Indeed, it is recommended to offer two rak'ahs voluntarily before one offers the obligatory prayer at Maghrib.

If you go into a mosque at Maghrib time, you offer these two rak'ahs and combine them with the greeting to the mosque. You are given the reward for four raka'ahs although you offer only two. Some schools of thought do not mention these two raka'ahs as recommended. They are of the type of voluntary prayer which is known as "not *moakkadah* ".

This means that the Prophet used to offer these two rak'ahs before Maghrib only occasionally.

•Delivery by a male Doctor.

Is it permissible for a Muslim woman to have her baby delivered by a male doctor?

In normal circumstances, a Muslim woman should have her baby delivered by a Muslim woman midwife or doctor. It is not permissible for her to reveal of her body what a man is not allowed to see of her. However, there are circumstances which make a woman's condition particularly difficult and she needs to be attended by an experienced or specialized male doctor. It may happen that such a doctor, with the necessary expertise, cannot be found among the lady doctors in the community. In such circumstances, if the man doctor equipped with the necessary experience attends her delivery, that is permissible. One must not forget that this is in an emergency case and emergencies are treated individually, according to the need and the risk involved in every particular case.

[Added: e.g. Haraam meat is permissible to save life, so long as it is not taken more than absolutely necessary to sustain life. It is the niyyah that is the crucial factor.] The rule is that if a woman can do the job in hand satisfactorily, resort to a man is not permissible to a Muslim patient. When the skill or experience required is possessed only by a man, his services may be employed within what is needed.

•An undutiful son and inheritance.

1. A relative of mine has one son by his first wife and two more as well as four daughters by his second wife. Relations between the first son and his stepmother were not very good all the time. As he was managing his father's properties, he moved with his own family into one of his father's houses. There was a long dispute between father and son and the latter complained to the village administrative committee, headed by his own friends. They excommunicated the father making a manifestly one-sided verdict. Insulted and irritated, the father has transferred many of his own properties to his second wife and her children and made a will that his first wife's son should not inherit anything from him. The father has now died. May I ask what Islam says about his own and his son's action? How to divide the properties?

2. A close friend of mine, who has a son and a daughter by his previous marriage (since divorced), has gifted all his land and property to his second wife and his children by her. He has, however, taken due care to adequately provide for his daughter by his first marriage while denying the same to his son, due to his gross disobedience and misbehaviour towards him. He says that this is permissible under the provisions relating to an undutiful child. Could you please comment on this action in the light of Islamic law of inheritance?

The apparent similarity between these two letters and the problems they outline is highly significant. The problem is not peculiar to any particular community. In fact, this story is heard often, when friction between stepmother and her husband's children develops into a long-drawn dispute. It is more likely for such a problem to become irreconcilable when the father is rich and when he is too busy or too involved to take an objective attitude to protect the rights of every one concerned. While no one disputes the right of the father

to have a second wife, if his first wife dies or if his marriage is not successful, or indeed for other reasons, he must be careful not to allow friction to develop between his second wife and his children by his earlier marriage. Such friction does not only spoil the happy family life but it can easily lead to problems which may earn the father himself Allah's displeasure, if he become unfair to any party among his closest relatives.

In both these stories, we find the father resorting to the extreme measure of transferring his property to his second wife and her children. In the first case, the father denies his son by his first marriage the right to inherit him. In the second, the father tries to give his actions a legal aspect by saying that he is invoking certain provision in the Islamic law of inheritance. In the first one, he is making a will depriving his son of inheriting from him. Neither action can be sanctioned by Islam.

It is quite possible that the father in such a case becomes very unhappy with his son who may resort to measures which are unacceptable and in conflict with his duty to be kind and respectful toward his father. Such actions by the son may appear to his father worse than they really are, especially if the son is consistently accused of disrespect and furthering his own interests without giving due regards to his father. However, the father must never forget his responsibilities and must be careful to give every one of his family what is due to them of care, love and fair treatment. I cannot help the feeling that the father in the first case has been heavily leaning toward one side in the dispute in his family. I imagine that the son would not have dared complain about his father to the village committee without having very good grounds for making such a complaint. In a village community, a son, especially an adult, is expected to be dutiful to his father and not to oppose him in any fashion. It seems, however, that the dispute was a fierce one, and probably continued for a very long time. The son has been able to persuade a committee to pronounce a verdict against his father, although the members of the committee must have been keenly aware of the difficulty of their task and that they must never violate the village rules of propriety and morality. My reader describes their verdict as one sided. It may have been so, but was the father's attitude throughout the dispute a fair one, or did he lean to one side more than the other?

In both cases, the father must have never allowed the situation to worsen so badly. He should have stopped the fire before it burnt the peace in his family. Be that as it may, the fire could not be put off with the sort of measure to which both fathers had recourse, namely, denying the son his right of inheritance. I am amazed at the suggestion that this can be sanctioned by Islam under certain provisions. This is certainly not the case.

The Islamic law of inheritance is very detailed and its details have been given to us by Allah Himself. It is not possible, therefore, to add to it or delete from it any provisions. What Allah has ordered must be obeyed, if it sometimes appears to us that a certain clause which has not been included in this law may be appropriate. One of the balanced rules of this law of inheritance is that no one can give any of his heirs an extra portion of his estate by will. It is, therefore, not open to any father to give any of his children a little extra on top of his or her apportioned share. On the other hand, no father may disinherit any of his children. Their shares have been determined by Allah and they are entitled to them, disregarding the parents' wishes and desires.

It appears, however, that in both cases, the fathers have resorted to other measures, assigned their properties to those of their heirs whom they favoured, having little to be divided according to the law of inheritance. Such a transfer of property during the lifetime of its owner and when he is in possession of his senses is accepted as legal. However, that legality is merely formal. Allah will undoubtedly hold the father to account for his action. The father will have to justify it and such a justification may be beyond him. How can he answer Allah when he asks him : How can you prevent your son from receiving what I have assigned to him by way of inheritance?

What I am trying to say here is that although a court of law may approve the measures taken by the father as legal, he still has to justify them to Allah who knows true intentions and motives as well as circumstances. If the other heirs of the father want to be kind to him, they will hold a meeting of reconciliation and divide the property left by the father according to the rules of the Islamic way of inheritance.

In the first case, the reader asks how the property should be divided. In all, the father has left behind one wife, three sons and four daughters. His wife inherits one eighth of all the properties and the remainder is divided into ten equal shares. Each of the four daughters receives one share while every one of the three sons receives two shares. In other words, if the second wife of the man and her children want to lighten the burden of the father, they should give the son by his first marriage a share which amounts to less than one fifth of his father's property. By doing so, they would do the father a great act of kindness and they help bring about a reconciliation within the family. Who knows, but the sons and daughters of the second marriage may find themselves in need of their elder brother who will be ready to help, if he feels that they have nothing against him. They can demonstrate that by giving him that to which he is entitled by his father's property.

[Added : If you gift some of your property during your lifetime to any of your children for a very cogent reason, you may do so. If, however, you are doing so because you feel that a

particular child, e.g., the eldest son or a daughter, should inherit more because according to you the share fixed by rules of inheritance are not to your liking or that they are not fair, then you will be placing your wisdom above that of Allah and you will be answerable to Allah for He is all wise and knows best.

•Shorter prayers during travel.

Is it obligatory to shorten ones prayers during travel?

A traveller is strongly recommended to shorten his Dhur, Asr and Isha prayers to two raka'ahs each, because this is in line with what the Prophet has taught us. We do it not because prayers become a burden during travel; they do not. We do it praising Allah for the concession as an exercise of strength, not weakness. This is the proper attitude.

•Profits offered by a leading Islamic publishing company.

A leading Islamic publishing company in a Muslim country accepts deposits from member of the public and pays the depositor a monthly profit at a fixed rate. It adds a condition that if the depositor withdraws his money, he has to give one month's notice when the company will return the actual amount originally deposited. There is no time limit for keeping the investment. Is this practice permissible?

There is nothing wrong with placing certain conditions on an investment, such as requiring one month's notice for withdrawal of deposited money. The company wants to be able to adjust the withdrawal of deposits without affecting its transactions. Similarly, there is nothing wrong with paying profits at regular intervals. But what worries me is that the profits paid by the company are given at a fixed rate. What this means is that the returns on the investment have no proper relation to the actual profits of the company. Nor is the depositor taking any risk with his investment. In other words, if the company makes losses, rather than profits, it will continue to pay the fixed rate of profits to the depositors who bear no proportion of the losses. For these two reasons, i.e. the absence of risk and the advance determination of the rate of returns, the partnership between the depositor and the company is not complete. Therefore, the transaction cannot be approved.

•A question of validity of pilgrimage.
When I offered the pilgrimage last year, I was not fully aware of all the duties I had to do and their timing. I did the sa'ie before doing the tawaf of arrival. I missed the sacrifice because when I went to the bank, they were not accepting any new payments. I also missed the tawaf of farewell. Is my pilgrimage valid?

The sa'ie has always to be done after a tawaf. It can be done after the tawaf on arrival or the tawaf of ifaadhah. If you were asking me the same question during your pilgrimage, I would have told you to repeat the sa'ie after the tawaf of ifaadhah. However, since the pilgrimage is over and you have returned home, I hope that your mistake falls within the category for which no compensation is required. The Prophet says : "My nation has been forgiven what they do through genuine mistakes, or out of forgetfulness, or what they are forced to do." I pray that this applies to you in this particular case.

As for the sacrifice, it remains outstanding. You can offer it this year instead of last year. Even if you missed out on doing it during the pilgrimage season, you can still do it afterward. You may ask one of your friends who is going to the pilgrimage to buy a voucher on your behalf and do what is necessary. If you delay it further, you go to Makkah or ask someone who is going there to arrange the slaughter and the distribution of the meat of the sacrificed sheep to the poor of the Haram area. As for the tawaf of farewell, you have to slaughter a sheep in compensation for that. The same applies to this sacrifice as the other.

There is no question that your pilgrimage is valid. Pilgrimage is not invalidated except through sexual intercourse during ihram. On the other hand, if one does not attend at Arafat on the 9th of Thul Hajjah, he is not a pilgrim. The other essential duty of pilgrimage is the tawaf of ifaadhah. If one misses that and goes back home without doing it, he has to come back for it, even if he has gone to Alaska or to New Zealand, which perhaps are the farthest points from Makkah.

As for missing other duties, or doing them wrongly, the slaughter of a sheep is adequate compensation. When it is done, the pilgrimage is considered complete.

•Islamic names.

Is there anything such as Muslim or non-Muslim names? Names are taken on regional or language basis. Names used by Muslims today were used by people before Islam, such as David, Jacob, Abraham, etc. albeit they are used in their Arabic forms Dawood, Yaqoob and Ibraheem. These names are also used by Christians and Jews. In some countries, Chnstians use such names as Khalid, Khadija, etc. which are supposed to be Muslim names. Please comment.

It is a child's right, according to Islam, to be given a good name. If his father does not give him a good name, he can press his claim against his father on the day of judgement. In Islamic culture, names are chosen either on the basis of their meaning or their historical associations. If you call your child after someone who rendered great services to Islam, you want your son to remember that fact and to take that particular personality as an example to follow. If you admire that person and know his history, you will be telling your child about him as soon as he begins to understand. You try to make him love that person and follow his example.

Similarly, we use the names of prophets because they provide the perfect example for us to follow in submitting ourselves to Allah's will and dedicating our efforts and actions to the service of the Islamic cause. It is true that Christians and Jews call their children after their prophets, such as the ones whose names you have mentioned, but then those prophets also brought the message of Islam, i.e. submission to Allah, in its pure form. Therefore, they belong to our heritage.

It is also true that Christians and other religious minorities in a Muslim country use some names which are used by Muslims. There are good reasons for that. In certain periods of history, using a certain variety of names may be particularly convenient. In Arab countries, which fell under European imperialism for a period of time, it was noticed that the European form of Christian names was used by these minorities. After independence, it became more common to use either the Arabic form of these names or names derived from the culture of the country. That is a natural reflection of the state of the country.

When we say that a name is Islamic, we mean that either its historical associations or its meaning should be acceptable from the Islamic point of view. The names of the companions of the Prophets were used very widely, generation after generation.

Therefore, they became distinctly Muslim names. Similarly, names of prophets are Islamic names, despite the fact that these prophets were sent with messages before Islam.

[Added : It is laid down by Allah - ayah 285 of Cow from the Quraan, whose translation in English may be rendered as : "*The Messenger believeth in that which hath been revealed unto him from his Lord and (so do) the believers. Each one believeth in Allah and his Angels and His Scriptures and His messengers - making no distinction between any of His messengers - and they say : We hear, and we obey. (Grant us) Thy forgiveness, our Lord, Unto Thee is the journeying.*"

•A woman's marriage and the consent of parents,

1. I have met a man whom I would like to marry, but my father is against this marriage. He says that the man I have chosen is poor and uneducated. I have answered him that the value of a man cannot be measured either by his wealth or by formal education. The personality and the character of the man are of far greater value. My father tells me that it is not permissible for a girl to get married without the knowledge or the consent of her parents. He says he must be a witness. If not, the marriage is illegal. How about if I am away from my parents? Can I then get married without their consent? If I do so, am I committing a sin? I am rather confused. I do not wish to disobey my parents but I want a satisfactory solution to my problem.

2. A friend of mine who wants to get married has not been able so far to obtain the consent of the parents of the lady he wishes to marry. His own parents are in agreement with him. The lady has all the necessary capabilities to get married from the point of view of Islam and the local rules of law as well as the social customs. Her parents' refusal seems to be arbitrary. What I would like to ask is whether it is permissible for my friend and the lady in question to elope and get married on their own, without waiting for her parents' consent. If they do, is there any offence committed on their part? I understand that if they travel 40 kilometers, then their marriage can be legally sanctioned. How far is this true in the light of Qur'an and sunnah?

Many people commit the folly of considering their present problem in the light of their immediate interests, as they view them now. Sometimes they are not even interested in listening to arguments which may question the wisdom of their choice. Moreover, at the time people think of getting married, they are normally young, full of life. They are unlikely to want to listen to voice of experience. Young people tend to think that their feelings and circumstances are unique to them. They imagine that a parent or an elderly person cannot have ever experienced the same feelings and cannot understand the intricacies of the problems they are facing. Hence they think of a way to overcome the objections to their choices or prejudices when they are raised.

I must admit that I agree with my first reader who says that the value of a man should not be measured by his wealth or formal education. There is much more to the personality of a man, or indeed a woman, than either of these considerations, despite the great importance of education. I also applaud her statement that she has no wish to disobey her father. That is the proper attitude of good Muslim children, especially when it comes to the marriage of a young woman.

I am not sure what my second reader means when he says that the lady who is at the centre of this marriage problem has all necessary capabilities to get married on her own, especially when he adds the phrase "from the point of view of Islam." If he means that she is of the right age and she has enough wealth of her own or that she is wise enough to judge a person and his character, how can he tell that this is "all" that is needed from the Islamic point of view? That may be sufficient from the legal point of view in your part of the world,but does it agree with what Islam says?

The answer to this problem is very simple. The father's consent to his daughter's marriage is absolutely necessary for the marriage to be valid. The Prophet is quoted to have said : "No marriage may be made without the presence of the woman's guardian and two responsible witnesses." The majority of scholars concur that a woman may not give herself away in marriage, but her guardian must act for her. Nor can she give an authority to anyone else to act for her in marriage. Moreover, a woman cannot act for another woman in a marriage contract. [That is to say: even a mother cannot].

As for the person who should be her guardian for marriage purposes, there is no doubt that it is her father. If he is available, then no one else may act for her. If her father is not available, either because he is dead or mentally deranged, then her parental grandfather or great grandfather may act for her. If she has no father or grandfather, then her adult son

may act for her. Next in line is her brother. There are further details on this point to outline who comes next.

It should be said that the condition of a guardian to act for a woman in her marriage does not detract from her the ability or the qualification to make the right choice. Indeed any such guardian should have her consent before he goes ahead with the marriage arrangements. His presence is required not as a witness but as her representative. This is an aspect of the honourable position which Islam assigns to women. Moreover, it reflects on the seriousness with which Islam views marriage. It is a family matter which is conducted by families. Moreover, when the woman is represented by her family, this is more conducive to ensuring that her rights are respected by her husband. Besides, the nature of society Islam builds is one in which the woman normally takes her natural position, looking after the future generation. That is bound to limit her social activities a little. Her judgement of people, especially of men and their characters, may as a result need to be supplemented by that of other men in her family.

This is not the first time I am asked whether when a woman travels a certain distance from her hometown, she may marry herself away. I find it very strange. To start with, a woman must not travel on her own. If she does, she violates Islamic teachings. To do it in order to evade certain conditions in her marriage sounds like resorting to a backdoor way in order to achieve something which cannot be done in a straightforward manner. May I ask here: against whom is this backdoor way employed? It is simply a trick to avoid Islamic rules. In other words, it is a trick which aims to invalidate Allah's instructions. This is something to which a Muslim never resorts. There is no doubt in my mind that if a woman undertakes such a journey in order to get marriage without her father's consent, she is disobeying Allah. Furthermore, her travel does not affect the status of her marriage in any way.

The second reader asks whether the lady can elope with her prospective husband. May I say that her elopement may give her the legal convenience of being able to get married without interference by her parents. But how can she get away from the rule of Islamic teachings?

If a woman marries herself away without the presence of her father or guardian, then her marriage is invalid. The Prophet is quoted to have said: "A woman does not marry another woman away and a woman does not marry herself away. Only an adulteress gives herself away in marriage." Imam Ahmad and Abu Dawood relate on the authority of Aisha that the Prophet has said; "Any woman who marries herself away without the consent of her guardian, her marriage is invalid, invalid, invalid." These Hadiths leave us in no doubt as to the invalidity of such a marriage.

However, if a woman does marry herself away in this fashion, without the presence of her guardian, the marriage needs to be pronounced null and void by a judge or by the governor or ruler of the locality. She may not be married to another man, even though her father is acting for her, before such nullification of her invalid marriage. If her guardian marries her away to another man before such pronouncement, the second marriage is also invalid. Both need to be pronounced null and void by a judge. The reason for this is the need to spare the woman the problems of being claimed by two husbands. All sorts of problems may arise and the less the possibility allowed for them the better. After making such an invalid marriage, she is entitled to retain the dower he has given her, if she has had intercourse with the man who is her partner in it.

•Fantastic rewards for simple worship.

I read in a religious book a story which says that the Prophet once asked Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, to do five things before going to sleep every day. These were: to pay to charity 4000 dinars, to recite the whole of the Qur'an, to pay the price of heaven, to reconcile two quarreling people, and to offer a pilgrimage. When Ali protested that he could not do all these every night, the Prophet told him that to recite the surah: "Al-Fatihah" four times will equal giving away 4000 dinars to the poor, and to recite the surah entitled "Al-Ikhlas", three times, which equals the recitation of the Qur'an, and to recite three times a certain prayer equals the payment of the price of heaven, and to say ten times a certain supplication for forgiveness equals bringing about reconciliation between two quarreling people and the recitation of a certain part of a particular verse of the Qur'an equals the offering of pilgrimage. Ali promised to do that every night. My question is whether that is correct and supported by evidence from Hadith?

An important point in the overall Islamic concept of life, man, the day of judgement, and the life to come, is that this world represents a chance for every one of us to prove himself to be a good and obedient servant of Allah. If he proves that, he is entitled to being admitted into heaven, and if he fails, he is bound to be thrown into hell, unless Allah chooses to forgive him.

There are a variety of ways by which a human being can make sure of passing the test. Sheikh Ali Al-Tantawi, a renowned contemporary scholar, makes the analogy in which he describes heaven as a beautiful house with a superb garden and a fence all round. However, there are many doors in that fence and admission through any of them is allowed. He says that for everyone in the crowd outside, gaining admission into the garden or the house is the primary objective. It does not matter which door he is allowed to go through, as long as such permission to enter is granted to him. The doors to heaven are numerous. Every one is represented by one of the good actions or virtues Islam encourages its followers to maintain or observe. Pilgrimage, for example is a means to get one's past sins completely forgiven. Therefore, every Muslim has the urge to go to pilgrimage in fulfillment of his duty to Allah, which is to do the pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime when he will have his sins forgiven. Some people go on pilgrimage every few years, in order to ensure that whatever they may have committed of sins after their previous pilgrimage are also forgiven. Other people may choose to fast voluntarily, because fasting is a great act of worship and Allah has promised great reward for fasting. You find that there are certain people who observe a habit of fasting one or two days a week, throughout their lives. They undoubtedly earn a great reward, which makes it easier for them to gain admittance to heaven. Other people may choose to be exceedingly generous to poor people. Sadaqah, or alms, also earn great reward. Others may choose to offer voluntary prayers. You find some people standing up in prayer at night, for long periods, worshipping Allah when no one hears or sees them.

There are other ways of earning Allah's pleasure, such as helping people with their problems, fighting for Allah's cause, bring about an atmosphere of love and mutual confidence within the Muslim community, etc. All these are matters which can be described as marks of obedience to Allah. They help a person to pass the test of this life in order to ensure a better life in the hereafter.

What we should remember is that Allah punishes a bad action to the extent that it is worth. However, He rewards a good action with ten times its value. This applies to all deeds and actions we do during our lives, without compulsion. Moreover, Allah is so generous in His reward that when we think of doing some good action, He rewards us for it as if it is done. When we actually do it, He increases that reward to ten times the value of that action. Furthermore, He may increase His reward many more times. Indeed, the reward may be as high as seven hundred times the value of the action itself, or even more. But He does not give extra increase haphazardly, or to people whom He wants to favour. Every reward must be earned. Two people may give SR 100 each to a poor person. One of them may receive the reward of having paid SR 1000, while the other may receive greater reward.

There must be a reason for that, which Allah values highly, such as the amount paid by the second man represents a large part of his savings, or indeed represents no savings at all He needs it for his own family's needs, but he prefers to give it away in order to help someone who is in greater need for it, while the amount paid by the first man may represent only a fraction of what he has. Intention and other factors may increase the value of a good action done by a Muslim, and therefore, increase its reward. We know for certain that Allah is fair to all of us. He does not lose sight of what we may do at any time or any place. Indeed, every small action we may choose to do, whatever it is, will be recorded for or against us.

Now, if Allah is so fair to every one of us, how come that He would reward an apparently easy action in the same measure as one which requires a much greater effort or represents a much harder task? If you examine this story carefully, you will find that it is improbable on the one hand and illogical on the other. Its improbability arises from the fact that it requires Ali to do each night several actions, each one of which represents a great prize which every Muslim yearns. People continue to save for years on end in order to afford pilgrimage, and here we have the reward of a pilgrimage being earned by repeating certain verses of the Qur'an in a matter of two of three minutes. Furthermore, one of these actions is described as the price of heaven. That price, to every one of us, is a continuous action throughout our lives, which makes us always watchful for any pitfalls, so that we may remain obedient to Allah. Moreover, the whole story is illogical because it equates certain actions with rewards which are totally unrelated to them. Thus, reciting the Fatiha is claimed to equal paying to charity one thousand dinars. That is not dissimilar to a teacher of mathematics asking a child to add four apples and three pears. Why should repeating a form of supplication be equivalent to bringing about reconciliation between quarreling people?

The fact is that this story and ones of similar nature are fabrications. If it is true that one can get the reward of donating so much money and reciting the whole Qur'an and performing pilgrimage and paying the price of heaven in a matter of minutes, then no one of us needs to do any other thing. Allah wants us to be always conscious of Him, to remember Him and obey His commandments and to conduct our lives according to the constitution He has provided for us. It is only through such conscientious observance of Islamic teachings that we pass the test of this life and gain admittance into heaven. Such fabricated stories encourage idleness, and therefore, failure in this test.

May Allah grant us all the ability to do what He requires of us and to help us pass the test of life, earn His pleasure, and to be forgiven our sins by Him.

•Ablution and nail polish :

It is said that ablution is not valid if a woman wears nail-polish. At the same time, it is said that ablution is valid if one wipes over one's stockings, instead of washing one's feet. If I apply my nail-polish after I take my grand ablution at the end of my menstrual period, why must ' remove it before renewing my ablution, if i I do not have to remove my stockings for the same ablution?

The analogy you have drawn may sound logical. There seems to be a case for comparison. However, matters of worship are not decided on the basis of logical arguments. In our worship, we follow the Prophet's guidance. Whatever he says we must follow. That is because he is the messenger who is infallible in matters of faith and worship. On one or two occasions, he suggested certain things which were not the best course of action in their relevant situations. But these were matters which have nothing to do with religion. As far as Allah's message is concerned, he conveyed that to us complete and intact. Everything he said to us is correct. Moreover, it is how Allah wants us to worship Him. With regard to prayer, the Prophet instructs us; "Pray as you have seen me pray." When he went to pilgrimage, he said: "Learn from me your rituals." Therefore, we do not determine our actions in matters of worship on the basis of logical analogy, but on the basis of what we have learned from the Prophet.[Added; Islam prohibits prostration or kissing of stones, which is termed as idol-worshipping. Yet, during pilgrimage, we are directed to kiss the Black Stone.]

In the case of ablution, when any substance covers any spot of the parts of the body that we need to wash and it prevents water from reaching the skin, then ablution is invalid because it remains incomplete. Therefore, if the nail-polish you use, prevents water from reaching your nails, it spoils your ablution. Sometimes people use a certain red liquid to heal their cuts or wounds. This takes a long time to wash away, but it does not effect the validity of ablution, [Added: Use of hinna, for instance, does not invalidate ablution.] since it does not prevent water from reaching the skin. As for wiping over socks or stockings, we know that the Prophet once did that. Hence, it is permissible. But it applies to socks and shoes only, not to any other part of the body. For example, we cannot wipe over gloves or over our sleeves in order not to wash our hands. If we do that, then our ablution is not valid.

•Rejection of the Jew or the Jewish.
Someone told me that billiards is a Jewish game and Muslims should not play it. Please comment.

It is the first time I hear that billiards is a Jewish game. Even if it is, there is no harm in playing it. That applies to everything people may invent or make. Unless something is intended to undermine Islam, or ridicule it, or reflect badly on Muslims or their faith, and unless it is meant to glorify something that is contrary to Islamic teachings, there is no harm in making use of it. Nothing of this applies to the game of billiards. Perhaps you should reflect a little on your question. You must not forget that Islam is a universal message which addresses all mankind. As such, it has something to say to every human being. Therefore, it does not hold anyone in disregard unless that person chooses to take a hostile attitude to Islam. If you combine this with the fact that it is permissible for Muslims to marry Jewish women, you will appreciate that we do not reject anything simply for being Jewish. We do not take a hostile attitude towards any person, race or faith unless they begin by taking hostile attitude towards us or towards our faith. Perhaps I should add that to brand any activity as being Jewish is wrong in the first place.

•Transporting the Qur'an.
I am leaving on vacation and I want to take a copy of the Qur'an with me. Is it appropriate to put it in my suitcase?

What we are required to do when we carry copies of the Qur'an with us, whether for a short distance or traveling by air, is to make sure that the Qur'an is not mishandled when it is carried. There is nothing wrong with putting a copy in your suitcase, in between your clothes, but away from your shoes. Maybe it is preferable to put it in your brief case, if you are carrying one. If you are not carrying anything heavy on the plane, you may put in in your carrier bag, if your handbag is too small for it. What is important is to keep it always in a position where it cannot be mishandled.

•Zakah - a tax liability?
I live in a rented accommodation, since I do not have a house of my own. I have earmarked a certain amount of my savings for the purchase of a plot of land to built a house. Since I have not been able to get the plot of

land which meets my requirement, that amount of money is lying in the Bank. Am I supposed to pay zakah for it? I have also purchased some gold ornaments with the intention of giving them to my two sisters when they get married. In the meantime, the jewelry remains with me. Is it liable for zakah? If so, is there any way I may be exempt from paying zakah? I have given an amount of money to a relative of mine. I want that amount to be adjusted against my payment of zakah, fearing that he will not be able to pay it back. Can this be done? If so, am I supposed to inform him of the same?

What worries me in this letter is the clear desire to reduce one's liability of zakah to the minimum possible. In other words, the writer's approach to zakah is the same as any ordinary person's to taxes imposed by secular governments. I realize that in many countries, tax avoidance is accepted as legal while tax evasion is considered an offence. There are differences between the two, but the point here is the recognition by legal authorities and the desire and attempt to reduce one's tax liability are legitimate.

The case is totally different with zakah. One must never forget that zakah is an act of worship. It is true that it is a financial transaction, but one pays it out when it is due, because of the reward one expects to receive from Allah for having paid it. One may say that since Allah has given us our money and He has imposed on us a duty to pay zakah, we do nothing to deserve any reward when we pay it out. That is not Islamic view. When one does what Allah has bid him to do, he is rewarded for his compliance and obedience. Quite apart from all the social benefits which the payment of zakah brings to an individual and a community, the fact that zakah payment is an act of worship, which is rewarded by Allah, should make every one of us keen to pay it when it becomes due. Moreover, a person who does not have enough funds to be liable to pay zakah feels that he misses out on a source of reward which enhances his standing on the day of judgment.

All this goes to show that we should not look for ways and means of reducing the total sum of zakah which we need to pay out, but we should pay our zakah willingly, hoping for reward and expressing our gratitude to Allah for having given us enough to satisfy our need and to be able to hold some savings which put us above many of our brethren. When we do that, Allah is sure to give us more and He rewards us.

Although you have earmarked some of your savings for the purchase of a piece of land, and despite the fact that such a building plot is not added to your possessions, these

savings are not exempt from zakah. When you have bought the land and constructed the house, you pay nothing in zakah against either the land or the house, unless you let it out. In that case, you pay on the rent you receive from it. If you use it for your own accommodation, it is not liable to zakah.

That applies, however, when the land is bought and the house is constructed. It cannot apply in advance. You may be totally committed that you will not use savings for any reason other than your house construction. But you realize that, faced with a pressing emergency, you may find these savings handy and spend them without waiting for the house or the land. There is no way that cash in the bank, held as savings, can be exempted from zakah, when you own more than the threshold of zakah, for any reason. Whatever purpose one intends to use the money for, the liability remains the same.

The jewellery you have purchased for your sisters is your own. It is true that you have no use for it except to give it to your sisters when the occasion arises. But until then, the jewellery is yours. Therefore, it must be calculated as part of your property. Women's jewellery, when they are within reasonable limits, are exempt from zakah. That is because they use the jewellery and they do not hold it as savings. However, a woman must pay zakah for her jewellery if she considers it a method of saving.

However, if you give that jewellery to your sisters, without waiting for their marriages to take place, the situation becomes different. It becomes part of their property. Zakah liability is applicable to each man and woman separately. Therefore, each of your sisters is treated on her own. Each of them has to look after her own zakah. If you pass on the jewellery to them, they need not pay zakah for it, as long as it is within what is considered to be reasonable for women in their social status.

Having said that, I must explain that when you give this jewellery to your sisters, the transaction must be a serious one. They must know that you intend that the jewellery becomes their own property which they use as they think fit. You will have no further claim to it, except inasmuch as you have a claim to any sum of money which either of your sisters has earned or inherited. While the jewellery remains with you, you know that you can sell it to meet an emergency. You may decide that facing such an emergency is more important for the present, and that you will be able to buy something else for your sisters when their marriages are to take place. But if you give them the jewellery, you cannot do that. If that is clear in your mind and theirs, and you actually give them the jewellery, then you need not pay zakah for it.

Had you, when your uncle asked you to lend him some money, made a quick calculation and came out with a portion of your expected zakah liability and gave it to him as a gift, that would have been fine. It is permissible to pay zakah in advance. Therefore, if you pay it to someone in need when he actually needs it, that is well and good. Similarly, giving someone a loan to meet certain needs is a highly commendable act. As Muslims, we do not expect to receive interest on such loans, and actually refuse to take it when offered. Lending to someone in need is an action which cements social relations. Allah rewards us for such actions.

Scholars differ as to when the zakah for loans is paid. There is no disagreement that the creditor is the one who is liable to pay zakah for the amount of the loan. However, he should pay it out regularly if he knows that the debtor is sound financially and that he will undoubtedly pay his loan. If one has some doubts about being paid back what he has lent, then he commits no sin if he does not include the amount of the loan in his calculation of his liability for zakah. When he is actually paid back, he immediately pays out the zakah due for the amount of the loan, if the date of his payment of zakah has already passed. You can certainly do that if you fear that your uncle might not be able to pay you back for a long time to come.

However, what you cannot do is to make a set off of the loan against your zakah. You cannot say to your uncle that he need not pay you back because you intend that what you have given him constitutes a payment of zakah. Here you are paying zakah to yourself. What you can do is to pay your uncle some or all of your zakah as a gift, without giving him the slightest hint that you expect him to use the money to pay you back your loan, that is well and good. If not, you must not have any hard feelings because he actually commits no offence if he uses it for other legitimate purposes.

•Collective supplication. [*Ijtemaee Dua'*]

It is the practice in mosques in certain parts of the Muslim world that the imam offers supplication after he has finished the prayers and the congregation answers with 'Amen'. Is this supported by Sunnah?

It is true that this practice is quite common in many parts of the Muslim world. We have no authentic report that the Prophet ever did this after having finished congregational prayer. He certainly finished prayer with glorification of Allah and praising Him, but he did that privately and he instructed his companions to do likewise. The best time to supplicate is

after one finishes *tashahhud* and just before finishing prayer altogether. If he says a couple of short supplications at that time, then he follows the Sunnah. He may lengthen that supplication as much as he wishes, if he is prayirig alone.

However, supplication by the imam during the prayer, with the congregation confirming the supplication with the word 'Amen', which means 'Answer our prayer, our Lord,' is acceptable. This form is known as '*qunoot.* ' The Prophet did that in witr prayer and in other prayers in times of urgent need facing the Muslim community or when some of its members or the whole community were in distress. Therefore, *qunoot* in witr is a Sunnah, while it is recommended in times of distress.

[Added: Allah has directed in Qur'an - Surah "The Heights" whose translation in English may be rendered as:"*Call upon your Lord humbly and in secret. Lo! He loveth not the transgressors" (7:55)* and again "*And do thou (O Muhammad) remember thy Lord within thyself humbly and with awe, below thy breath, at morn and evening. And be thou not neglectful."(7:205)* Thus Allah directs secret supplication.]

•Modern toilets - supplication in.

When one goes into a bathroom where both toilet and washing facilities are joined together, as is the case in todays houses, is one expected to say the prescribed supplication? How is this to be reconciled with the restriction of carrying anything on which a name of Allah is written or reading any part of the Holy Qur'an in toilets?

What you mention of the restrictions in a water closet is correct. We are advised against mentioning the name of Allah in the toilet or to take anything in which a Qur'anic verse or the name of Allah is written, unless it is properly enclosed or kept in a protective cover, and there is no chance of it falling down. However, the prayer which one says just before going to toilet is said as he approaches it, not when he goes inside. When he finishes and leaves, he only says the short prayer "I seek your forgiveness"

[Added: or *Rabbigh-firlee*] You note that the name of Allah is not mentioned.[Added: There is no bar against supplication in your hearts, secretly.]

As far as the supplications associated with washing every part of one's body during ablution, I should perhaps explain that none of these is authentic. One makes the

intention to do the ablution and he starts doing it, without the need to utter a word. Therefore, the problem does not arise.

•Payment of zakatul-fitr [at place of residence or back home?]

Is it true that we should pay zakatul-fitr in the place where we have sighted the moon of Shawal? Many of us expatriates arrange for that zakah to be paid in our home countries. One reason why we do that is because we cannot identify genuine beneficiaries of zakah here. Back home, there are many poor and needy people. Is it acceptable if we send our zakah to be paid to its beneficiaries back home?

It is normal procedure to pay zakah where one lives. If you are normally resident in this country, you should pay zakah here. However, there are many cases where expatriates work in a well off country. It is difficult to find poor people who suffer from poverty. In such a situation, there is no harm in sending your zakah to be paid in your home country, provided you are pretty certain that the poor of the place you live can be easily looked after.

This is not a case which applies to Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries, but many Muslims living in Europe or America also do likewise.

•About fortune telling & the curse of precious stones.

Is it true that diamonds and other precious stones should be bought only for personal use and this be determined on the basis of knowing one's exact date of birth. Some people suggest that if this is not taken into consideration, these precious stones may have a curse and bring bad luck to the wearer.

May I ask: What happens to a person who does not know her exact birth date, or indeed the year in which she was born? You may recall that until recently, the majority of people in large areas of the world did not have any official records of births and deaths. Before the turn of this century, such registration was not legally required in many Muslim countries. Tribal areas in Africa and Asia may have kept certain records, but these were hardly on the basis of days, dates, months and years. Women have always worn ornaments and have

used precious stones for this purpose. If what you say is true, bad luck would have hit so many millions of people and that was sure to disrupt human life, as a whole. The fact is that there is no truth whatsoever in this superstition.

However, your question gives me the opportunity to state clearly that the time of birth has no significance whatsoever. I realize that people attach some importance to the time of birth, which act can at times be very much exaggerated. Astrologers tell us that if they know the exact time of someone's birth, they can set up his or her horoscope and they can tell that person a great deal about his or her personality and future. They claim that by knowing the exact time of birth, they can calculate which star was rising and which was descending, and these movements indicate certain things for human beings. Besides, newspapers and magazines in most countries have a horoscope column which tells people, who are born between certain dates, what to expect in the period immediately after the publication of that issue of the paper or magazine. Although most people read these for fun, some of them take them seriously.

From the Islamic point of view, we accept nothing of these claims. Indeed, the Prophet warns us against consulting any fortune teller, regardless of the method he or she uses to tell us our fortunes. Moreover, the Prophet describes fortune tellers as liars, even when they happen to say the truth [i.e. fore-tell correctly.] That means that if a fortune teller tells us something and it turns out to be as he had said, he still is a liar because when he told it to us, he did not know it for certain. He was simply guessing. When a person tells us something which is only guess work, he must be a liar. Indeed the prohibition to fortune tellers including astrologers is very strict. To believe that someone may know the future is tantamount to disbelief in Allah, because it suggests that these people know something which in fact is known only to Allah Himself.

May I also say that the idea of something having a curse is totally alien to Islamic thinking. Islam accepts nothing of the sort. Diamonds and precious stones do not have a will of their own. Nor indeed have they any power to cause any good or harm. They are lifeless objects. Therefore, they cannot bring us any good or bad luck. Anyone who suggests something of the sort, needs to have his mind examined.

•Circumcision - is it obligatory?

A Hindu friend of mine has embraced Islam. He is very happy with his new faith and everyone is encouraging him to learn more about Islam.

Our sponsor wanted to take him to hospital for circumcision, but we were told by an Egyptian friend that there was no need. Please comment.

Your Egyptian friend is right. Circumcision, for new born boys, is recommended. It is not compulsory. Therefore, if a child born to a Muslim family is not circumcised and he remains so until his death, he does not commit a sin. It is true that it is unhygienic to remain uncircumcised, but when we speak of a certain situation from the Islamic point of view, we have to classify it according to the teachings of the Prophet.

Since this friend of yours is an adult, and he has only recently embraced Islam, to pressure him into going to hospital for circumcision is wrong. Let him choose for himself. There should be no great emphasis attached unduly to circumcision. If he is a good Muslim, whether he is circumcised or not, it does not affect his status in any way.

Some people may be scared lest this action in adult life should result in some complications. Others are too shy to go through it. Why should there be pressure when Islam has not required it?

•On Divorce
- the Islamic limits and regulations.

The Islamic *Shari'ah* has placed a number of obstacles in the ways of divorce in order to confine it within the narrowest possible compass. Divorce without lawful necessity and without first exhausting all the other means mentioned earlier of resolving the conflict is unlawful and is prohibited in Islam. Some jurists maintain, it is injurious to both husband and wife, unnecessarily damaging the interests of the two, which, like the wasting of property is *haram*. "Do not harm yourself or others," the Prophet has instructed us.

People who divorce their spouses and marry others in order to enjoy a variety of sexual partners are liked neither by Allah nor by His Messenger. The Prophet called them "the tasters," saying: "I do not like the tasters, men and women," and "Allah does not like the tasters, men and women." Abdullah bin Abbas said, "Divorce is (only) in the case of necessity."

Prohibition of divorce during menstruation

When divorce becomes necessary, it is not permissible for the Muslim to implement it any time he pleases; he must wait for a suitable time. According to the *Shari'ah,* this suitable time is when the woman is clean following her menstrual period or the period of perpetual discharge following childbirth and before her husband has resumed sexual relations with her, or when she is pregnant and her husband is aware of her pregnancy.

The reason for prohibiting divorce during menstruation or the period of puerperal discharge is that, since during such periods sexual intercourse is *haram,* the idea of divorce may come to a man's mind because of sexual frustration and nervous tension. He is therefore advised to wait until his wife is clean and to divorce her then, if he is intent on divorce, before the resumption of marital relations.

Just as divorce during menstruation is *haram,* it is likewise *haram* between menstruation periods (i.e. "the period of purity") if the husband has had intercourse with his wife following the termination of her previous period. Because it is possible that she may have become pregnant from this union, the husband may change his mind concerning divorce when he knows that his wife is carrying a child, desiring to stay married to her for the sake of the embryo in her womb. However, when the wife is in the period of purity but he has not had intercourse with her following the termination of her menses, or when she is pregnant and he is aware of it, he will be able to ascertain that his intention to divorce her is the result of deep-seated antipathy, and accordingly is permitted to carry through with the divorce. In the *Sahih* of Al-Bukhari, it is transmitted that 'Abdullah bin Umar mentioned [such a] matter to the Messenger of Allah, he became angry, saying: "He must take her back. If he still wishes to divorce her, he may do so when she is clean of the menstrual discharge before having intercourse with her, for that is the period of waiting which Allah has prescribed for divorce" He referred to the *ayah*, *"O Prophet, when you (men) divorce women, divorce them during the prescribed periods."(65:1)*. Another version of this *hadith* reads: "He commanded him to take her back and then divorce her when she is clean from the menstrual discharge or (otherwise) is pregnant."

A question now remains: If a person does divorce his wife during these prohibited periods, does the divorce become effective or not? The prevailing opinion is that it does become effective, although the husband will be considered sinful. However, some jurists hold that, it does not become effective, as Allah did not legislate it so and whatever is not legal cannot be correct or enforced. Abu Dawood, on sound authority, has transmitted that when Abdullah bin Umar was asked, "What would you say if a man were to divorce his

wife during menstruation?" he related his own story of divorcing his wife during her period and the Prophet's commanding him to take her back, disregarding his pronouncement of divorce.

Taking an oath of divorce

It is not permissible for Muslims to take an oath of divorce, vowing that if particular event does not occur, his wife will be divorced, or to threaten her by saying that if she does this or that particular thing, she will be divorced. In Islam an oath may be expressed only in one specific manner, that is, in the name of Allah alone. Apart from this, no other form of oath-taking is permitted. The Prophet said, "Anyone who swears by (anything) other than Allah, has committed shirk." and "Whosoever wants to take an oath should take it in the name of Allah or keep silent.:

Where the Divorcee resides during the waiting period

The Islamic *Shari'ah* requires that the divorced woman remains in her home, her husband's house, for the duration of her *iddat* (waiting period). It is not permissible for her to move fròm the house, as it is likewise not permissible for her husband to evict her without a just cause. This requirement leaves the way open, during the *iddat* following a first or second pronouncement of divorce, for the husband to revert to his wife without the requirement of remarriage. Her presence in the same house with him makes it quite probable that the mutual sympathy and love between them may be rekindled. If she is pregnant, the passing of months will make her pregnancy obvious, which may be a further inducement to him to change his mind. In any case, ample time is at their disposal to reconsider the whole situation. With the healing effect of time, feelings of antipathy may give place to affection and reconciliation, and the revitalization of their love may occur.

...And fear Allah, your Lord. Do not turn them out of their houses, nor shall they leave (of their own accord) unless they commit some clear immorality; and these are the limits set by Allah. And whoever transgresses Allah's limits indeed wrongs his own soul. Thou knowest not; it may be that Allah will afterwards bring some new thing to pass. (65:1)

If they must separate, it should be done with dignity and kindness, without mutual abuse, injury, recrimination, or infringement of rights, Says Allah Ta'ala: "*Either retain them in kindness or part with them in kindness...*" *(2:229)*. "*For divorced women a provision (shall be made) in kindness, a duty for those who are conscious of Allah.*"*(2:241)*.

Repeated divorce

The Muslim is allowed three chances, that is to say, three pronouncements or acts of divorce on three different occasions, provided that each divorce is pronounced during the time when the wife is in the period of purity and he has had no intercourse with her.

A husband may divorce his wife once and let the *iddat* pass. During the period of *iddat*, the two have the options of being reconciled without the necessity of remarriage. If, however, this waiting period expires without reconciliation, they are now fully divorced. Each of them is free to marry someone else or to remarry each other; should they want to remarry each other, a new marriage contract is required.

If after the first divorce the husband is reconciled with his wife but later the hostility and conflict begin all over again, all efforts at reconciliation and arbitration resulting in failure, he may divorce her a second time in the same manner as described above. In this case, too, he can return to her during the *iddat* without remarriage, or after the *iddat* has expired through a new marriage contract.

But it may happen that although he is reconciled with his wife again after the second divorce, he may later divorce her for the third time. This will then be a clear proof that the hostility between the two of them runs very deep and that they are incapable of living together. If this third divorce takes place, it is not possible for the husband to return to his wife during her *iddat* nor may he remarry her after the *iddat* unless she has been married to another man, to live with him as a permanent and true wife, and he then subsequently divorces her. It is, however, totally prohibited for the other man to marry and divorce her simply in order to make her *halal* for her first husband.

Those Muslims who utter three divorce pronouncements at one time or in one statement are rebels against Allah's law and are deviating from the straight path of Islam. Once the Prophet was informed about a man who had pronounced three divorces at one time. He got up in anger, saying, "Is sport being made of the Book of Allah while I am (yet) among you?" As a result, a man stood up and said, "O Messenger of Allah, shall I not kill him?"

Reconcile honourably or separate with kindness

When the husband has divorced his wife and the period of *iddat* is passing, he has two alternatives : either to reconcile with her honourably - that is, to return to her with the intention of living in peace and harmony, and not in order to torment or harm her - or to

free her and part with her in kindness by allowing the iddat to expire without arguments and harsh words, and without setting aside any of their mutual rights.

It is unlawful for him to return to her just because the iddat is due to expire in order to torment her by prolonging the waiting period, thus depriving her of the opportunity to marry someone else. This was something that was done in the period of *jahiliyyah*. Allah Ta'ala then prohibited this injury to women in a very decisive manner, using a style of expression which makes the heart quake:

And when you have divorced women and they have fulfilled the term (of their iddat), either retain them honourably or release them honourably; but do not retain them in order to injure them, for this is transgression, and whoever does this has wronged his own soul. And do not take the revelations of Allah in mockery, but remember Allah's favour upon you and what He has sent down to you of the Book and the Wisdom, to instruct you by means of it. And be conscious of Allah, and know that Allah is aware of everything. (2:231)

A little reflection upon this noble *ayah* of seven phrases, containing warning after warning, reminder after reminder, ought to be sufficient for anyone who has any feeling in his heart or any hearing when it is recited.

The woman's right to demand divorce

The woman who cannot bear to live with her husband has the right to free herself from the marriage bond by returning to her husband the *mahr* (required marriage gift) and gifts he has given her, or more or less than that according to their mutual agreement. It is, however, preferable that he should not ask for more than he has given her. Allah Ta'ala says:

> *And if you fear that the two may not be able to keep to the limits ordained by Allah, there is no blame on either of them if she redeems herself ...(2:229)*

The wife of Thabit bin Qais came to the Prophet and said, "O Messenger of Allah, I do not approach Thabit bin Qais in respect of character and religion, but I do not want to be guilty of showing anger to him." The Prophet asked her about what she had received from him. She replied, "A garden". He asked, "Will you give him back his garden?" "Yes", she said. The Prophet then told Thabit, "Accept the garden and make one declaration of divorce."

It is not permissible for a woman to seek divorce from her husband unless she has borne ill-treatment from him or unless she has an acceptable reason which requires their separation. Said the Prophet, "If any woman asks her husband for a divorce without some strong reason, the fragrance of the Garden will be forbidden to her."

The prohibition of ill-treatment to elicit divorce

It is haram for the husband to torment and mis-treat his wife in order to compel her to seek a divorce so that she will return to him all or part of the property he has given her. Only if the wife is guilty of clear immorality, may her husband demand the return of all or part of the *mehr* to him. In this regard Allah Ta'ala says:

"*...Nor should you treat them with harshness in order that you may take away part of what you have given them, unless they are guilty of open lewdness."(4:19).*

It is also *haram* for a husband to take back anything from his wife because he hates her and wants to divorce her so he can marry another woman. As Almighty Allah says:

But if you decide to take one wife in place of another, even if you have given one of them a heap of gold, do not take (back) anything of it; would you take it back by slander and a manifest wrong: And could you take it back, when each of you has been privately with the other, and they (the wives) have taken a solemn covenant from you? (4:20-21)

The prohibition of the oath of desertion

One of the aspects of Islam's concern for the rights of women is that it prohibits a man to be so angry with his wife as to discontinue sexual relations with her for a period which she cannot bear. If this abandonment of sexual relations is accompanied by an oath on his part, he is given a limit of four months in which to calm down and revert to her. If he comes to his norms and resumes sexual relations before the expiration of the four months, it is possible that Allah may forgive him for his excesses and open the door of repentance to him; however, he must still do the penance prescribed for a broken oath. If, on the other hand, this period expires and he has not returned to her, his wife is divorced from him as a just punishment for his neglect of her rights.

Some jurists hold that the divorce is automatic at the expiry of four months and no judgement from a court is needed. Others, however, require that at the end of the period the matter should be referred to the judicial authority, who will then give them the option

of reconciliation or divorce. [Added: That is variable in keeping the laws of various countries, but religiously they are automatically divorced.]

Such an oath of abstention from the wife is technically known in the *Shari'ah aseela*. Concerning it Allah Ta'ala says:

> *For those who take an oath of abstention from their wives, a waiting period of four months (is ordained); if they return, indeed, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. But if their intention is firm for divorce, then, indeed, (Allah) is Hearing, Knowing.(2:226-227)*

This period of four months has been specified to give the husband ample time to calm himself and to restore the relationship of his volition. Moreover, four months is normally regarded as the maximum period a woman can endure separation from her husband. Commentators on the Qur'an narrate the following incident in support of this opinion:

Caliph Umar found that a woman's husband had been gone on a military expedition for a long time. He then asked his daughter Hafsah, the widow of the Prophet, "How long can a woman endure separation from her husband?" She replied, "Four months." Subsequently, the caliph of the Believers decided that he would not send a married man away from his wife for a period exceeding four months.

•1 Marriage after divorce
•2. Restricting to the teachings of only one school of thought

My friend's sister was divorced two years ago by her husband and received everything that was due to her. Two years later, she was reunited with her former husband in marriage, but without marrying another man in between divorce and remarriage. This is contrary to the teachings of Hanafi school of thought. How far is it important to restrict oneself to the teachings of a particular school of thought?

It is by no means obligatory to follow strictly one school of thought in every ruling it makes. It is true that some students of Islamic scholarship may say that one should adhere to one school of thought, but that is neither possible nor practical. Within the same school of thought, you have different opinions. It is well know that Imam Al Shaf ie himself changed many of his rulings after he settled in Egypt during the last five years of his life. Similarly,

Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal, is quite often quoted to have expressed two views on the same question. Sometimes, one of the pillars among the scholars in a particular school of thought may differ with its founder on a specific issue. Thus you may find Imam Abu Youssuf or Mohammed ibn Al-Hassan differing with Imam Abu Hanifah on a particular issue. Such differences are a mark of the strength of Islamic scholarship and its solid foundation. Rigidity means weakness,,while flexibility and progress indicate strength. Islamic scholarship has produced over the centuries a long line of great scholars, each of whom may be considered on the same level with the founders of the four major schools of thought. No one suggests that their opinions and scholarships should be ignored.

Moreover, it is often noted that the particular circumstances of a certain question make the verdict given by a particular school of thought more appropriate, although the persons involved in that question belong to a different school.

Furthermore, how does a person who has little knowledge of Islamic teachings choose his school of thought? Is it not true that most of us say that they follow the Hanafi school of thought simply because it is the predominant one in their country of residence, or because they have heard from their parents that they belong to that school? Is this a reason to prevent them from seeking advice by other scholars? Certainly not.

As far as the practical aspect of following a single school of thought, this is impossible in most cases. I should say that it may be possible in a country where the overwhelming majority of scholars belong to a single school of thought, but nowadays when people have the means to go to different scholars, it is not that easy. You can compare seeing the opinion of a scholar to that of consulting a doctor. When you have a patient in the family, you try to take him to a specialist in the particular area of his complaint. You go to the doctor and show him the patient and seek his advice. When he has written you a prescription, you do not ask him at which university he has learned his profession and in which book he has read that this particular medicine is good for this particular condition and so on. When you go to a scholar to seek his opinion, or when you write to the religious editor of *Arab News*, you do not start by asking him to which school of thought he belongs. You simple state the case and seek advice.

On the particular question you have asked, there is a simple answer. I guess from the way you phrased your question that the woman's husband pronounced the word of divorce "I divorce you", three times in succession. He may have done this because he has learned, (from hearsay I should say), that this is the proper way to divorce one's wife. Let me say it

clearly that this is the improper way. It is indeed forbidden to repeat the words of divorce three times in succession. Once only is the correct way.

These three times are considered by substantial number of scholars as one time divorce. Therefore, the divorce is revokable and a remarriage between the man and his former wife is possible without the intervention of another marriage. Let me say clearly that to make special arrangements with another man to marry a woman who has been divorced three times, just for one night, or one week or indeed for any length of time, in order to make it possible for her to return to her husband is absolutely forbidden. Furthermore, it does not make her lawful to be reunited in marriage with her former husband.

However, such intervention was not made in the case of this woman. Therefore, her reunion with her former husband is acceptable. Let them be careful that should a divorce take place in the family again, the word of divorce must be said once only.

•*Iddat* or the waiting period for women

A woman observes her waiting period, whether after divorce or after the death of her husband, in the family home. She may not move to another house, and her husband (if she is a divorcee) may not turn her out. If the divorce takes place when she is out, she must return to the family home as soon as she learns of her divorce. This is clear in the first verse of the surah entitled ' Divorce," which may be rendered in translation as follows: " *Fear Allah, your Lord, and do not turn them out of their homes and they may not move out unless they commit a clear and gross indecency. Such are the bounds set of Allah : Whoever transgresses Allah's bounds causes injury to himself."*

According to the Hanafi school of thought, a divorcee who is observing her waiting period may not go out of her home either during the day or during the night. A widow in her waiting period may go out during the day but she must stay the night in her home. The difference between the two is that a divorcee is entitled to maintenance from her husband. She does not need to go about in order to sort out her affairs, while a widow has no maintenance to expect. If a widow's portion of the family home is not sufficient for her living, or if other heirs do not allow her to use their portions, she may seek some other accommodations. To stay in her home during her waiting period is part of the worship of a widow. If there are reasons which make it impossible for her to observe that worship, she becomes exempt from it. A good reason for that is her inability to pay the rent required of her in a family home, if any.

The Hanafi school of thought, however, considers it permissible for any woman in her waiting period, whether she is a divorcee or a widow, to go out during the day. Jabir, a companion of the Prophet, mentions that his aunt was divorced three times. She went out to cut her date trees but a man told her to stay at home. She went to the Prophet and asked him. He said : " You may go out and cut your dates. You may give some of it for charity and you may do some good action. " (related in An-Nassa'ie and Abu Dawood). Another report suggests that a number of women, who lost their husbands in the battle of Uhud, came to the prophet and said : " Messenger of Allah, we feel very lonely at night. Can we stay in the home of one of us, and in the morning, each one goes to her home?" The Prophet answered : " You may meet in the home of any one of you for conversation, and when it is time for you to got to sleep, let each one of you go to their home."

This means that a woman observing the waiting period must spend the night in her home. She may not go out except in an emergency, but she may go out during the day to attend to her affairs.

•Addressing prayers to the Prophet

1. Is it true that to pray Allah to forgive our sins taking into consideration the love and affection Allah bears to the Prophet is a form of polytheism? I am at a loss to understand how it could be so. How then can we ask the Prophet on the day of judgement to plead for us, when Allah Himself is ever closer of access to us on that day?

2. It is our belief that the Prophet will make on the day of judgement recommendations to Allah for the forgiveness of his followers. Keeping this in mind, it is appropriate to supplicate and request the Prophet to recommend us for forgiveness? Could you also please explain whether there are differences of opinion among leading scholars in this respect, i.e., addressing Allah through an intermediary.

The first point which I would like to make regarding this question, which comes up time after time, is: Who needs an intermediary? Allah Himself tells us in the Qur'an that He is near to us and that He always answers prayers by His servants. He instructs the Prophet in

the following term: *"If My servants ask you about Me, I am near, I answer the prayer of anyone who prays to Me. Let them, then, respond to Me and believe in Me so that they may be rightly guided."(2:186). We also read in the Qur'an "Your Lord says: Pray to Me and I will respond to you."(40:60)* There are several verses in the Qur'an which emphasize the fact that Allah answers prayers when we pray to Him. Furthermore, the instructions to address Him directly are very clear in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Therefore, who needs an intermediary?

Muslim scholars and those non-Muslims who study Islam agree that one of the sources of strength of the faith of Islam is the direct relationship it establishes between every individual and Allah. You are undoubtedly aware that Islam does not establish or recognize any clerical order. Individual responsibility is a fundamental principle of Islam and its correlation is the direct access which Islam establishes between the individual and his Lord.

Furthermore, Islam tells us that our salvation in the hereafter depends on our actions. The Prophet tells his own daughter: "Fatima, work (for your salvation), because I will be of no benefit to you in front of Allah." Ask yourself: when do you need an intermediary to achieve a certain end? The answer will be that an intermediary may be needed when you do not have a direct access to the person to whom you want to put your case, or when your position in relation to him is very weak. In the latter case, you seek the help of someone who has some influence on the person concerned. Does either type apply to Allah? The answer is definitely not.

It is an aspect of Allah's grace that He has given every single one of us direct access to Him. We address Him with our prayers, whether these prayers relate to matters of this world or of the hereafter. He listens to us and answers all our prayers. Moreover, in relation to Allah, we have an equal standing. It is our actions that draw us closer to Him. When any person addresses Allah, with sincerity and humility, he is certain to have his prayers answered. Indeed, Allah answers the prayers of people who may have been a short while earlier non-believers.

The point is when they address Him, they recognize his Lordship over them and over the whole universe. When they seek His help they also recognize that the God-head belongs to Him. At that very moment of praying to Him, they, either directly or indirectly, believe in Him and in His power.

He gives us in the Qur'an the example of the people who find themselves in a boat in the sea, and fierce wind blows and they are about to drown. At that moment, they pray to Him with total sincerity and devotion: Save us and we will ever be thankful to You. He saves them, but they nevertheless turn away from Him.(11:22) He also describes himself as the One "*Who responds to a person in dire need when he prays to Him" (26:62)* It is to be noted that this last description comes within the context of enumerating some of the most prominent of Allah's attributes. He does not describe Himself as answering the prayers of believers, but of those who are in dire need. The only requirement is that they recognize His Lordship over them, and the fact that they address their prayers to Him is such recognition.

When we realize that by addressing a prayer to Allah we are demonstrating our recognition of His Lordship over the universe, it stands to reason that addressing our prayers through an intermediary is a form of associating an intermediary to Allah as a partner. Allah accepts no partners.

He says in a qudsi hadith: "I am in no need of any partner. I abandon anyone who associates a partner with Me. He can take what he wants from that partner."

•Prohibition of Pork.

Could you please explain why eating pork is forbidden. There are so many opinions, but can you provide a final answer? May I also ask whether breeding pigs is forbidden?

Allah describes the Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an as one who "makes lawful for them (i.e.his followers) all things that are good and forbids them all that is evil." Therefore, anything which is clearly forbidden in Islam must be evil. Otherwise, it would not have been forbidden to us.

This is a general statement which applies universally. It is sufficient for us to know that pork is clearly forbidden to conclude that it is evil. When we examine religious teachings we find that certain prohibitions are clearly related to their causes. We are told that this particular thing is forbidden because it results in so and so. In such cases, when we are certain that the effect no longer applies, then the prohibition is relaxed. In other cases, there is no cause stated for the prohibition. This means that the prohibition will continue for all time. In the case of pork, no cause has been specified. Therefore, pork will remain evil and forbidden for all time to come.

It is perfectly in order for Muslims to try to determine the cause of prohibition of any matter. When they come out with an answer, they must not make their conclusion final, in the sense that they will say that the prohibition is only linked to this particular aspect. If they do, they run the risk of superimposing their conclusion on Allah's legislation. This is not allowed to anyone.

In the case of pork, people have suggested a variety of causes for its prohibition. Any one or all of these reasons may be relevant and correct. However, we cannot say that only for these reasons pork has been forbidden. Let me say that pork is forbidden because it is evil and will remain so for all time.

According to Islam it is forbidden to produce or sell or breed what is of no benefit. What is forbidden is without benefit whatsoever. It is forbidden to sell or breed or produce intoxicants. The same prohibition applies to pigs and pork.

[Added:When you fall sick, you go to a specialist who prescribes certain medicines and tells you to eat some special diet and that you should refrain from eating certain food. You do not argue or probe or even for a moment doubt the judgement of that specialist. It is surprising that a prohibition by Allah should become a matter for discussion.]

•Prayer with closed eyes

I am in habit of closing my eyes when I pray, because this helps me concentrate better on my prayers. However, I was told that this is discouraged by the Prophet as it was a practice by the Jews. Is it correct.

It is true that closing one's eyes during prayer is discouraged. The reason for that, however, is not that you have been told of as the need of Muslims to do everything different what the Jews do. There is more down-to-earth reason for that. It is simply the need of the worshipper to be aware of what may take place or may come across close to him when he is engaged in prayer. If a person is offering his prayer in a field or in an open place and a dangerous insect approaches [even non-dangerous insect is undesirable], he will not notice it if he is praying with his eyes closed. Perhaps you are aware that it is permissible for a person engaged in prayer to kill a snake or a scorpion if it comes near him, without interrupting his prayer, regardless of what movement he may have to make in so doing. If he were to pray with his eyes closed, he may be bitten or stung by any such

creature without being able to defend himself. It is for the same reason that offering prayer at night in an unlit room is also discouraged.

[Added: In surah Al-Falaq (Day break), we seek protection of Allah "from the evils of darkness when it is intense."(113:3) Praying in darkness is, therefore, seriously discouraged.] However, if one is sure of his safety [Added: how can anyone be, when an act has been discouraged] and he finds that it helps him concentrate on prayer to close his eyes, he may do so. We are strongly recommended, however, not to be in the habit of closing our eyes while praying.

•Ablution (i.e.Wuzoo) and the wiping of socks.

I read in an Islamic monthly magazine that when a Muslim does his ablution, i.e. 'wuzu', he may pass his wet hand over his footwear, only if it is made of leather. Wiping of socks made of cloth is not permissible. The writer supports his opinion by saying that according to Arabic literature, the word "jawrab", which denotes socks, applies only to leather-made socks. Is this true?

What I find strange is the definition the writer uses for the word "jawrab". It is certainly not true that it denotes only leather-made socks. According to one of the best Arabic dictionaries, it means "feet wrapper". There is no hint that it must be made of any particular materials.

Where the writer has probably got confused is the fact that the question of wiping feet covers is entered into books of fiqh, or Islamic rulings, under the use of the "khuff". This is traditionally made of leather, but is different from socks. It is similar to shoes, although it is without heels. That scholars agree that this concession meant to make it easier for people to have ablution, applies to all the types of footwear which cover the area which we normally wash when we have the ablution. That includes the whole feet up to the ankles. In operating this concession we rely on the Hadith which tells us that one of the Prophet's companions was helping him to do his ablution by pouring water for him. When that man got ready to pour water over the Prophet's feet, the Prophet motioned him that he did not need to have his feet washed, but wiping his socks was sufficient. He said: "I have put them in when they were pure." That meant that he wore his socks after having had ablution.

It is perhaps useful to mention the rule here that if you do your ablution in the morning, or indeed at any time during the day, then put on your socks or boots, you make the intention (not by words but by being conscious of what you intend to do) to avail yourself of this concession. If your ablution, or wudhu, gets invalidated afterward, you do not need to wash your feet anew when you have a new ablution. It is sufficient to wet your hand and pass your fingers over the top of your feet.

To pass one wet finger over a small area of each foot is adequate. You may avail yourself of this concession for 24 hours at a time, provided you do not take off your socks. If you take them off, after having used this concession, you need to have full ablution, including washing your feet, before using this concession again.

Many people find this concession very useful if they spend a long time at their place of work, where ablution facilities may not be available. This applies particularly in countries where Muslims are a minority or an immigrant community.

•Photography - is it permitted in Islam?

I am often dismayed to see people wearing shirts and blouses which display images of birds, animals and even human beings. They even go inside a mosque to offer prayers. The other day, I felt greatly annoyed to see a man wearing a shirt with an advert of Good Year tires, showing a star boxer encircled with tires around his waist.

I have in the past distinguished between statues and engravings on the one hand and pictures as we know them today, which are either paintings or photographs, on the other. Statements in Hadith, which speak of "pictures" being distasteful or forbidden, clearly mean the first type, i.e. statues and engravings. As for photographs and paintings, these are of a different nature.

We may mention in this connection that the Prophet once used a piece of cloth with pictures on it for prayers. After he finished, he expressed his dislike to that piece of cloth and said that it distracted him from his prayers. From this we deduce that it is discouraged to use such material for a prayer mat. Its use, however, does not affect the validity of prayer.

When the Prophet mentions that pictures are strongly discouraged, he makes the exception "unless they be printed on material." This means material which is used for making clothes. On the basis of this, I must say that I am surprised by the strength of your criticism of people using such material. It is true that some people may find the sight of a man wearing a shirt with a large picture of a bird or a horse rather unpleasant. It may be even more so if it has the picture of a human being, but we cannot say that it is forbidden. Nor can we say that photography, as it is used today, is forbidden. Indeed, it has numerous beneficial uses. If it is used for a bad purpose, as in the case of pornography, it becomes forbidden.

I should perhaps also explain that it may be very unwise for a man to wear such a colourful shirt with attractive pictures inside the mosque, especially if he attends congregational prayers. By doing so, he may cause other worshippers to be distracted of their worship. Displaying advertisements of the type you have mentioned may be also unsightly. If the one who is wearing such an ad receives a fee for wearing it, it is all right, provided that what he is advertising is permissible.

Thus, an advert for car tires is acceptable but one for a brand of cigarettes is forbidden.

[Added: One most common use of photographs in many Muslim countries is leader worship. Some states have made it mandatory for the government offices to display the photographs of their leaders, as a sign of respect. Such an idea is far from Islamic and is forbidden. However, if one has special feelings for a particular person, even a leader, and he makes a display of this, it is all right. The very concept of any kind of homage to be attached to photographs is not permissible. That is to say, it is the niyyah that makes the difference in such cases.]

•Whimsical divorce.

May I put to you the case of a husband who was sitting on his desk with pen and paper, writing all sorts of nonsense. Following a sudden whim, he wrote on a piece of paper, "I divorce so and so (writing the name of his wife) three times." He went away, leaving the paper on the table. His wife entered the room and read the paper and immediately started crying. She informed her parents who immediately came and took her away with them. The matter still remains unsettled. Scholars in the local area give

contradictory views. It should be added here that the husband had no intention whatsoever of divorcing his wife. I will be grateful for your comments.

I have often said that Islam views marriage very very seriously. In fact, the seriousness with which Islam views this matter cannot be over exaggerated. Abu Hurairah quotes the Prophet as saying: "Three matters are taken seriously whether they are said in earnest or in jest: marriage, divorce and revoking a divorce." (related by Ahmad, Abu Dawood, Ibn Majeh, Al-Tirmithi and Al-Hakim) The point is that these matters cannot be trifled with. It is not possible for a person to go through a marriage contract, then to claim afterward the he is joking. That is totally unacceptable. Similarly, if he divorces his wife, he cannot protest that he has meant that in jest. Again if he has divorced his wife and she is still in her waiting period and he tells her that he has revoked the divorce, as he is entitled to do without a fresh marriage contract, then he cannot go back and say that he had said it in jest. These are matters that entail rights and duties. Therefore, they cannot be taken lightly. For this reason, the overwhelming majority of scholars agree that a divorce said in jest is valid and takes affect. The same applies to marriage and to revoking a divorce.

Effecting a divorce in writing is permissible, provided that the writer intends divorce. If he writes that without intending divorce then the divorce does not take effect because what is written does not necessarily mean what is intended. A person may write something on a piece of paper which may have no relevance to what is in his mind. He may be writing only to try a new pen or to improve his handwriting, or he may write the word of divorce in order to upset his wife, or for any other reason.

If a man writes the word of divorce intending something totally different, such as improving handwriting, then divorce does not take place. If his intention is to upset his wife, then, according to Imam Ahmad, the divorce takes effect.

If we consider the particular case cited by our reader, it is clear that the man has acted on a sudden whim. Most probably, that whim was to upset his wife. We accept as correct his statement that he had no intention whatsoever of actually divorcing her. Nevertheless, his action indicates that he wanted her to see the paper, realizing that she would be upset, as indeed has happened. That is the only explanation for his writing these words, leaving the paper on the desk and going out.

Let me say to this man that his joke or his whim is highly objectionable. It is done in bad taste. As a Muslim, he should know better than that. He knows what effect the thought of

divorce has on a woman. Why should he give his life's partner an impression that their partnership is over. If the matter is only a whim and there is nothing to make his wife expect that he may divorce her, then the poor woman must have had the shock of her life when she read that piece of paper. He obviously did not consider all the possibilities when he played his joke. He is an obvious case of a divorce made in jest. I can only give him the verdict of Imam Ahmad who says that this divorce takes effect. It is true that a few scholars have a different view, but we are here applying the Hadith which we have already quoted that divorce made in jest actually takes effect.

Perhaps it is useful to mention here that the Prophet was once told by one of his companions that he had divorced his wife a hundred times. The Prophet went up on the pulpit and spoke to his companions. He was very angry. He said to them: "Do you take Allah's book jokingly when I am still alive among you?" That comment by the Prophet certainly applies to every case of divorce made in jest.

If the man has written on piece of paper "I divorce - three times" as our reader has quoted, then this counts as a single divorce. Many scholars count it as a three-time divorce. However, the weightier opinion is that it still counts as a single divorce.

I have explained on numerous occasions that a single divorce is revocable within the waiting period, without the need for either a fresh marriage contract or a new dower. If the waiting period has lapsed, then a marriage between the divorcees is possible with a new marriage contract and a new dower.

Perhaps the man whose case has been explained to us wishes to go back on his divorce and to tell her that he wants her as his wife again. If she agrees, he may marry her again, giving her a new dower. She may wish to exact something more from him, for giving her such pain, by asking larger dower. If he agrees to that, it is payable to her and he has no authority to claim back any part of it, unless she gives it to him willingly. A Muslim woman has complete authority and sole discretion over what to do with her dower.

[Added: Allah in His wisdom has directed in the Qur'an that the wife should remain in her (husband's) house during the waiting period. Had her parents not taken her back hastily, the situation as described above may not have arisen at all and a reconciliation/retraction of the situation would have been much simpler. Indeed, Allah is Wise and Knows all.]

•When a marriage promises to be unsuccessful

A marriage was arranged for the sake of good names of the families concerned. The marriage was never consummated due to lack of love and trust. The husband refuses to divorce his wife and continues to provide her needs. She wants to make a fresh start in life. Is it open to her to seek divorce? If she does, will she be considered a sinner as the husband has provided everything? May I also ask whether there was an incident during the lifetime of the Prophet when a woman told him that she did not wish to stay with her husband for reasons known only to her. The Prophet asked the husband to divorce her.

There is an important dimension to marriage which is often overlooked. That is the personal and human dimension. When there are problems within marriage, people tend to concentrate on material aspects. They ask whether the man fulfils his duties of providing food and clothes to his family; is he generous or a miser? Does his wife need to resort to much pressure in order to persuade him to buy herself some clothes? etc. They also ask about his nature: is he hot-tempered? Does he often blow his top? Does he treat his wife with respect or does he insult her when they have a disagreement? But people do not ask about the other sort of fulfillment which is required in marriage. They are somewhat justified not to pry into other people's affairs. But it is important to realize that this is an essential part of marriage. If it is not established on the right basis, it could easily lead to the break-up of the family. Hence, we need to know what Islam says about this aspect.

Apart from the normal duties which both husband and wife have to fulfil in their new relationship, they have another duty which is by no means less important. Each of them has to help the other remain chaste. The sexual desire is a natural urge for both man and woman. Allah has made the satisfaction of that urge permissible only through marriage. When either party violates Islamic teachings and seeks to satisfy sexual urge outside the bond of marriage, he or she commits a very grave sin. There are many sorts of temptations which may lead a person to break Islamic rules and commit a gross indecency. Islam seeks to reduce or indeed nullify these temptations through building a society which combines a serious view of morality with practices which make it much easier for people not to err. One aspect of its overall plan to achieve this result is to encourage marriage and to make it the normal practice for young men and women . It also requires married people to help each other satisfy their sexual desires. In normal circumstances, it is not only easier but

also more satisfying to have such fulfillment only through marriage. Therefore, when this aspect of married life goes wrong, Islam views that situation very seriously.

I must stress that this applies to both man and woman alike. It is often acceptable in any particular society that a man divorces his wife because she is frigid. They recognize that such a woman cannot provide fulfillment. From the Islamic point of view, she does not help her husband properly maintain his chastity. The same applies in the case of woman. If she is neglected by her husband, this may weigh down heavily on her and a sense of being unwanted may be too troublesome to her. Why should she be exposed to such feelings day after day of her life?

In the example given by the reader, the marriage has been arranged for family considerations. In other words, the partners themselves may not have been consulted. They were put together where at least one of them did not wish to be married to the other.This is an arrangement which is not acceptable from the Islamic point of view. Be that as it may, once the marriage has been concluded, the couple were faced with a choice of trying to make a success of it or abandoning the arrangement altogether. I do not know enough of the circumstances of the case to make a judgement on who is right and who is wrong. However, the fact that the marriage remained unconsummated means that the husband at least does not view this relationship as permanent. He has apparently tried to fulfil his other obligations by looking after his wife and supporting her. However, he has left her with a sense of being unwanted or unloved. Such a feeling may sometimes be very hard for a woman to bear. It is only natural for a woman to feel that she is wanted, loved and cared for. If she does not find that with her husband, her marital life may be in jeopardy. She may want to finish with the whole arrangement. That is often the case although both husband and wife have a normal sexual relationship. But when that relationship does not exist, its absence serves as a continuous reminder to the wife that she has either failed to make an impression on her husband or that he rejects her outright. Many a woman feels it impossible to continue with such a relationship.

If a woman in this situation applies for a divorce, an Islamic court is very likely to grant it. There is a serious breach of this marital relationship and it may appear to be irredeemable. The woman is certainly not a sinner. The husband may claim to have provided her with everything. He has certainly left something wanting in her. He has rather failed in his duty to help her remain chaste.

The incident to which you have referred is correct. The wife of one of the companions of the Prophet, Thabit ibn Qais, came to the Prophet and said: "I have nothing to say against

the manners and treatment I receive from my husband, nor do I have anything against the strength of his faith. Nevertheless I dislike to continue to live with him as his wife." In her appeal to the Prophet to help her, she used an expression which indicated that she genuinely and seriously was unhappy with her marriage. Her mind was made up. She did not want to continue. The Prophet did not argue with her and did not try to persuade her to stay with her husband. He went to the husband, Thabit ibn Qais, and told him that his wife wanted a divorce. The man said that he had given her a good dower, and he was prepared to divorce her if she returned that to him. When the Prophet asked her whether she was prepared to do do that, she said that she was willing to give him more. The Prophet then told Thabit to divorce her once and take back only the dower he had paid.

At no time did the Prophet rebuke the woman or her husband for the failure of their marriage. He recognized that its continuation was unhealthy. Therefore, he went ahead with arranging a divorce.

If the lady in the present case wishes to leave her husband, she is fully entitled to do so. She only has to apply to an Islamic court to nullify her marriage. She has good grounds for having her application granted.

•Inter-faith marriages (Muslim man & non Muslim woman)

Marriages between a Muslim man and a Christian or Jewish woman is allowed but not recommended. If nevertheless a Muslim man wants to marry a Christian or a Jewish woman, how is this marriage solemnized?

You have adequately expressed my view on inter-faith marriages. Perhaps it is useful to say that when a Muslim man marries a Christian or a Jewish woman, he does not commit a sin. However, it is strongly discouraged. This is certainly stating the general rule. Individual cases must be considered on their own merits. It is possible that a Muslim man finds himself in a situation when marriage with a non-Muslim woman is desirable, perhaps because he has very little choice.

I know one man who had to leave his home country and live in a Western European country, where Muslims were a small minority. He spent the best of three years to marry a Muslim woman from any Muslim country. All his attempts failed. Eventually, he had no choice but to marry a woman from the place in which he lived. It is well known that of all other religions, we are allowed to marry women of the Christian or Jewish faiths.

If one finds himself in a situation where he has to marry a follower of either of these two religions, his marriage ceremony is conducted in the same way as a marriage with a Muslim woman. Why should it be otherwise? What is required in such a marriage is the same as a marriage between a Muslim man and a Muslim woman: An offer of marriage made by the woman's father or guardian and an acceptance made by the man in the presence of two Muslim witnesses. The dower, which is a sum of money, in cash or kind, must be specified as being given by the bridegroom to his bride.

The question is whether the woman's father, who is a Christian or a Jew, may act for her in such a marriage. The answer is in the affirmative, because she is not a Muslim. But the witnesses should be Muslims because their role is different from that of the bride's father. They may be required to confirm the actual marriage in front of a judge.

In order that their testimony be binding on a Muslim party, the husband in this case, they must be Muslims. The bride's father is acting for her and since both are non-Muslims, there is no objection to him doing what a father should do for his daughter when she is married. She is entitled to receive a dower in the same way as a Muslim woman enjoys that right.

•Inter-faith marriages (Muslim woman & non-Muslim man)

A marriage was formed between a Muslim woman and a Hindu man. Neither of them changed faith. At present they have children. What faith should the children follow? How is that women to be buried after her death? If this marriage is not valid, what will happen to her children? Can they be considered legitimate at all?

That marriage is simply not valid from the Islamic point of view. The woman may be a Muslim but, by accepting to be married to a Hindu, she has violated the teachings of Islam on marriage. She accepted to be wed to a man who is not lawful for her. Therefore, the marriage is null and void. In other words, her relationship with him is illegal.

As for the faith of her children, perhaps it is more pertinent to ask about her faith. The fact that she has gone ahead with this arrangement and has been maintaining it for several years, having become the mother of more than one child, suggests that she does not have much regard for Islamic teachings. Otherwise, she would have taken the necessary steps to determine whether her marriage would be legal or not. Having failed to do so, and

continued with this arrangement is a strong indication that she may not really care about what Islam says. Hence the question whether she is truly a Muslim or not.

I do not suggest that by marrying this man she is to be considered a disbeliever. I am only saying that she does not seem to care whether her marriage is valid or not. If a Muslim woman goes through the process of marriage with a non-Muslim, no matter what religion he follows, she remains a Muslim although her marriage is invalid.

Her relationship with her man is one of adultery, not marriage. Her children are illegitimate in the sense that they are born outside wedlock. However, they bear no blame for the actions of their parents. They should be considered Muslims if their mother is truly a Muslim. If it is doubtful that she will be helping them grow as Muslims, someone else from her family should meet that end. When she dies, she may be buried in a graveyard of Muslims, because her action does not constitute apostasy.

•Woman's jewellery - limit for zakah

I understand that each family is allowed 85 grams of gold. However, a middle class Muslim family possesses about 200 grams of gold in jewellery, which is used by the mother and her daughter. They need more for their own use, i.e. for the marriage of the daughter and her brother. What is the practical solution to this problem.

You confuse two separate issues. It is not true that a family is allowed 85 grams of gold. Indeed, any family or woman may have as much gold as she wants. There is no upper ceiling on how much of jewellery a woman may have. The figure of "85 grams of gold" has nothing to do with a woman's jewellery. It is the threshold of zakah, which means that if a person, a man or a woman, owns more than the equivalent of 85 grams of gold, or 634 grams of silver, and after the passage of one year, he still owns more than this basic amount, he is liable to pay zakah on what he has, at the rate of 2.5 percent. Indeed, he need not have any amount of gold whatsoever to become liable to zakah, if he owns more than the equivalent of that amount. All his possessions may be in ordinary currency.

As far as the jewellery used by a woman is concerned, it is exempt from zakah, as long as its amount is considered to be reasonable for women in her social status. A woman who is very rich may have jewellery amounting to much more than the 200 grams owned by this middle class family, and she need not pay a penny in zakah for that jewellery. Another

woman may have half as much in jewellery, but that would be much more than reasonable for women in her social status. Therefore, she pays zakah on what is considered to be excessive. This is a totally different matter.

I should explain that in determining if zakah is payable for gold or jewellery, or indeed anything else, we do not take the family as a whole. Every individual has to look after his or her own zakah. For the purposes of zakah, there is no such thing as joint ownership. If something is owned jointly, each partner has to calculate his or her share of that particular item and add it to his or her belongings in order to determine how much zakah he or she should pay out. What we pay in zakah is obviously determined by the relevant rules of zakah. [Added: A woman is not required to pay any zakah for her jewellery provided that two conditions are met: 1. The amount of jewellery she has should be considered reasonable for a woman in her social status; and 2. It is bought for her personal use, not as a means of investment. While some women are very fond of jewellery, the amount they have must not be excessive in order that it be exempt from zakah. As you realize, no exact figure can be given here. What is excessive in one case, may be reasonable, or low in the case of another. It all dependent upon the financial means. On the other hand, if the woman buys jewellery because she hopes to be able to sell it later at a profit, then it is no longer personal ornament.]

•Reluctant to become a Muslim - the "do's" & "don'ts"

I am a Christian who practices her religion at home and maintains good conduct, although I rarely go to church. I believe in the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ and that he was a true messenger of God, but I do not believe that he was son of God. I understand that Muslims too believe in Jesus Christ, but they also believe that Muhammad was the last messenger of God. I may begin to share their faith, not for any worldly gains or for the purpose of marriage, but for my own salvation. Indeed, I have no intention to get married; I wish to continue to serve my parents, as I am their only daughter.

However, I understand that if I become a Muslim, I shall be bound by many "do's" and "don'ts". I fear that I may not be able to fulfil that, and thus commit more sins, which will run counter to my whole purpose. I will

have to take a new name and I do not know how I shall react to my new identity at this stage of my life. Above all, I fear that the effect on my parents may be very negative, as they may be unable to withstand the taunting of my relatives or other people in general. I shall be grateful for your advice as to what my course of action should be. Can i remain a Muslim at heart, without observing the ritual prayers or fasting.

It seems to me that you have not learned enough about Islam to help you make up your mind whether you wish to adopt it as your faith. Your approach so far seems to be a rather emotional one. You see certain areas which are common to your own faith, as distinguished from mainstream Christianity, and the Muslim faith, particularly as it relates to the position of Prophet Jesus Christ (peace be on him). However, your desire to be on the correct lines is genuine. Therefore, it is important for you to learn more about the Islamic faith before you make up your mind whether you wish to adopt it or not. I cannot give you in this column more than hints which you may wish to pursue in order to help you determine your next step. Before we speak about Jesus Christ and Muhammad (peace be upon them) as messengers of Allah and prophets, there is a principle of Islamic faith which must be very clear in our minds. What Islam requires of its followers is to submit themselves wholly to Allah. That submission is reflected in our actions, as well as in our beliefs, thoughts and ideas.

Islam is based on the principle of the Oneness of Allah. That is what you actually say when you make your declaration which brings you in the fold of Islam. You say: "I bear witness that there is no deity save Allah and that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger." The first part of this declaration places the strongest emphasis on the Oneness of Allah.

Godhead means authority. In relation to Allah, that authority is total, all embracing. In every sphere of life, in every affair, in every case and situation, Allah's authority is supreme. He does not only determine when we are born and the time of our death, but also decides how we should conduct our lives. He has given us a message and a complete way of life for us to implement. What that means is that He has total authority to legislate to us in all matters and in all spheres. The prophet conveys to us Allah's message and we accept it without hesitation. This acceptance, coupled by the determination to do what Allah has bid us, no matter how difficult it may appear at times or how costly it is, is a manifestation of our submission to Allah.

This is indeed the very meaning of the term "Islam". In Arabic, it means "to surrender". We surrender ourselves to Allah, in the sense that we determine to do His biddings in all situations and in all affairs. If we make the declaration that we believe in the Oneness of Allah, but have no intention of following his orders, our declaration is without value. Therefore, if one wants to be a Muslim, one should know what being a Muslim entails. That is the least expected from a person intelligent enough to decide what faith to follow on the basis of his or her choice.

You seem to be worried about the requirements of the Islamic faith. What you have to remember is that Islam is a complete way of life. It provides us with guidance in every aspect of life. It does not make a lengthy list of duties and prohibitions just for the sake of giving orders. Nor is there any arbitrary prohibition of duty. Everything that Islam requires of its followers to do or to abstain from has a reason behind it. In their real total sum, Islamic duties work for the benefit of man and help establish human life on a very happy basis.

If we look carefully at the duties and prohibitions a Muslim is required to observe, we find that they fall into three main divisions. Some of them relate to basic beliefs, such as the duty of worshipping Allah alone, and the prohibition of associating any partner with Him. We can also include in these the acts of worship; such as prayers, fasting, etc. These are meant to enhance the good character of a person. When we think of prayer and how it provides a real and continuous relationship with Allah, we are bound to recognize that it sharpens a Muslim's sense of what is appropriate and what is not. The Prophet says: "A faith which does not require its followers to pray is devoid of goodness." Fasting moulds the character of a Muslim to be able to with-stand any sacrifice which he may be called upon to render.

Other duties and prohibitions of Islam relate either to moral values or to day-to-day transactions between people. They ensure that a Muslim does not take advantage of others or usurp their right or property. Together, they provide safeguards which ensure that every one of us receives what is due to him or her.

Allah does not benefit by restricting our movements or our actions. The benefit of Islamic duties and prohibitions is reaped by us. Allah tells us that if every single one of us was as pious and God-fearing as the most righteous amongst us, we will not increase His kingdom in any way, nor will we decrease it in any way if every single one of us was as wicked and disobedient as the most evil person that has ever lived.

Islamic duties and prohibitions are not difficult to observe. There is nothing in them which is included arbitrarily. They all serve a common purpose of making human life easy, happy and fair. No Muslim has ever complained that to observe his Islamic duties is difficult. It is true that every one of us may at times yield to temptations to violate Islamic teachings, but we can always repent and pray to Allah for forgiveness. He is the most merciful, the most forgiving. He finds no pleasure in punishing us for our mistakes. Indeed, he loves that we repent and declare our regret for having committed a sin. When we do that, He forgives us. When we declare that we believe in Him, we must always try as hard as we can to observe His teachings. When we make an error, as we all do, we try to rectify it. Furthermore, we know that our observance of what He requires of us will ensure for us great reward. The total sum of that reward is admittance into heaven.

Furthermore, what we are required to do is to try to be as obedient to Allah as we can. If something is prohibited, we should refrain from doing it. When we are required to do something, we will do it to the best of our ability. If we have that approach, we can easily earn Allah's pleasure.

Many new Muslims prefer to have Islamic names. This is, however, not always required. The Prophet changed the names of some of his companions, because their names had a bad meaning. The overwhelming majority retained their names. I do not see any reason for you to change your name.

As for the effect on your parents on your becoming a Muslim, I feel that you should handle this in a careful way. You may start by speaking to them about Islam, in order to dispel any lingering prejudices they may have about it. The problem may be no more than being not fully aware of what sort of faith Islam is. If you are able to persuade them that Islam is totally unlike the distorted picture Western culture paints of it, they may have no objection to your becoming a Muslim. As for the taunting of other people, I am afraid that you may be exaggerating these. Anyway, you should balance the pros and cons of any major step you wish to take.

As far as becoming a Muslim at heart, without revealing the fact or practicing Islam, I am afraid this is not acceptable. Many people asked the Prophet to allow them a relaxation of certain duties, but he told them that that was not up to him. Islamic duties are imposed by Allah, and He alone can forgive anyone who is lax in fulfilling them.

You may choose not to publicize the fact that you have become a Muslim, but you cannot just overlook your Islamic duties.

•Fasting on Fridays

Some scholars in our country suggest that fasting on Fridays, other than in Ramadan, is inappropriate. Is this correct?

What is discouraged in relation to voluntary worship, including prayer and voluntary fasting on Friday is to single out Friday for the purpose. Thus, it is discouraged to fast voluntarily on Fridays, unless you also fast either on Thursday preceding it or the Saturday following it. Similarly, it is discouraged to single out Friday night for night worship, unless you join it to either the night preceding or the one following it. This applies in normal situations.

If there is a good reason for singling out Friday for fasting, then it becomes appropriate.

Suppose that a man could not fast during Ramadan, he may have fallen ill. He has a hard job to do which makes fasting exceedingly difficult. His rest day is Friday. In this case, it is perfectly in order for him to fast on Fridays in order to compensate for the days he did not fast in Ramadan.

•Helping non-Muslims

A Christian fellow countryman of mine has died recently. A number of our compatriots have contributed to a fund to help his family. Is it permissible for me also to contribute to it?

It is certainly permissible to help a poor Christian family, unless one knows that they are actively hostile to Islam.

It is reported that Umar ibn Al-Khattab saw an elderly Christian man begging. He asked about his situation and when he was told that the man was a Christian, he ordered that he should be given help from the treasury of the Muslim state.

His reasons were that the man paid the tax imposed on non-Muslims when he was able to earn. Therefore, he was entitled to help when he lost that source of his income.

•Night prayer or "Tahajjud"

Could you please give clear ideas about night prayer and its timings, maximum and minimum number of rak'ahs and the method of offering them.

Night worship, or 'tahajjud', is a voluntary prayer which may be offered at any time during the night, after one has offered the obligatory prayer of Isha', and before offering dawn prayer, or Fajr. However, the latter part of the night is preferable for this prayer. It can be offered any night, and one may pray short or long rak'ahs, as one wishes. If he is praying in congregation, it is recommended to the imam to make sure that everyone in the congregation is willing to have long rak'ahs, before he starts. If one is offering night worship, or tahajjud, he is recommended to finish it with witr. The minimum number of rak'ah of tahajjud are two, excluding witr, and there is no maximum. However, it is authentically reported that the maximum number of rak'ahs the Prophet offered on any one night was eleven, including witr. It is suggested that the maximum he offered was thirteen. One may recite the Qur'an loudly or may read it privately in tahajjud. It is preferable to recite loudly if he is alone or if he is in congregation, or if there are people near him who would like to listen to, or may benefit by his recitation. On the other hand, if there is someone close to him who is doing his own night worship, or someone who is asleep and may be disturbed, then it is preferable to read the Qur'an privately.

•Donations for building mosques -

The mosque in our locality is being rebuilt, but much of the money is received as donations from rich people who acquired their wealth through cheating the government and bribery. What is the Islamic point of view in this matter? Can one stay away from such a mosque and pray at home on grounds that it is built with money earned through non-Islamic ways? Can donations from non-Muslims be used in the construction of a mosque?

What worries me in your question is the sweeping remark that rich people have acquired their wealth through unlawful means. It is not beyond a highly God-fearing man who has a good measure of business acumen to get rich through perfectly legitimate means. While it is true that some people may not have any scruples about cheating the government or bribing officials in order to get some unlawful advantages, we cannot apply the same

standards to everybody in a sweeping statement which condemns everyone that gets rich. Among the companions of the Prophet, there were people who managed to become very wealthy and none of them can be accused of having used unlawful means.

When the mosque is built in your locality, to abstain from offering prayer in it is wrong. By doing so, you deprive yourself of an opportunity to congregational prayers. You will be abandoning a duty. Allah tells us to bow down in worship with others who do likewise. That means that congregational prayer is a duty.

The fact that some of the money received for building the mosque may have come from a suspect source is no justification to abstain from attending it. To start with, donations received from Christians and other non-Muslims can be used in the construction of the mosques. That is certainly permissible. Moreover, the committee collecting donations is not required to verify the source of every donation made. What you have to remember is that giving a donation is a separate transaction. The money itself is not contaminated by the process it is earned. Therefore, if I sell a certain item of merchandise to a person who pays the price with money he had stolen or had received as bribery, my earning is perfectly legitimate because I am not responsible to verify his source of income. The same applies to the fund-raising committee for building the mosque. You may say that these people are known to accept or take bribery or whatever, but Islam does not conduct its dealings with individuals or communities on the basis of hearsay.

•Women's travel by taxi

Is it acceptable for a woman to take a taxi or limousine or to be driven by the family driver when she is alone or with her young children? If not, how can women arrange their transport if they must go out to attend to an important duty during the working hours of their husbands?

What Islam censures is that a woman be alone with a man in a situation which may lead to something forbidden. That happens when they are behind closed doors. This does not apply to traveling by car or taxi. Therefore, she and her husband must make sure that she is safe when she uses a taxi.

What we have to understand is that there are circumstances when a woman needs to go from one place to another when she cannot be driven by her husband in their family car. Consider, for example, the case of a nurse in hospital whose working hours clash with

those of her husband. How is she to arrange her transport if the hospital does not provide her with that facility? The practical thing is to make arrangements with a limousine company which employs trustworthy drivers. If she makes such arrangements, she is not at fault. Once she is certain of her safety and that she will not be exposed to any harassment, she may have such an arrangement, or she may employ a regular driver.

•About "aqeeqah"

When my son was seven days old, I gave him the name of Ar-Rafi' and did the "aqeeqah" on his behalf. Recently, I was told by a friend that this name was one of attributes to Allah, and I should change it. I did that, but a scholar in our community told me that I should do another 'aqeeqah' for the other name. Is this true?

Let me say first that Ar-Rafi' is an attribute of Allah, but it is not one of those which may be used only with Allah. If you had retained your son's name, that would have been appropriate. Now that you have changed it, your action itself is permissible. The opinion of the scholar who told you that you need to have a fresh aqeeqah for your son is perhaps mistaken. Aqeeqah is the slaughtering of one or two sheep to organize a party to which neighbours and relatives are invited so that they join in the celebration of the new arrival and share in the joy of the family Allah has blessed with a son or daughter. Therefore, the aqeeqah is offered for the child, not for the name. No fresh aqeeqah is recommended in your case.

•Whom to help and how

We are expected to share our prosperity with others. Kindly list the relations and other people, in order of priority, who may be entitled to receive our help. To what extent would this fulfil the need of our first priority before moving on to the next? What is the reasonable percentage of our income we should spend on our relatives and others besides zakah to be considered generous in Allah's measure?

Thank you for raising this subject which is often neglected. People often think that when they have paid their zakah, they have discharged all their financial obligations. They are

largely unaware that Allah is not satisfied with a community which professes to be Islamic if a section of it remains in need while another section is very affluent. Everything in the financial and economic system of Islamic society is geared toward narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor. When Islam is properly implemented in a society, this gap steadily decreases until it totally disappears. Even when Islam is halfheartedly or partly implemented, the poor are sure to receive help which is not limited to zakah. The basic principle of the Islamic system is mutual financial and social security. There are numerous Qur'anic verses and Hadiths which encourage coming forward with financial donations so that the poor get their share of society's wealth. I will quote only one Hadith which shows the importance of looking after the poor, especially when they are one's neighbours. In this Hadith, the Prophet swears three times that a particular person is not a believer. Amazed and shocked, the companions of the Prophet wondered who was that person. He said: *"The one who goes to bed having eaten his full while he knows that his neighbour, nearby is suffering from hunger."* Perhaps we should reflect a little here. The Prophet does not describe such a person as a miser or stingy or tight fisted. He describes him as devoid of faith and he swears three times to the fact. The action required here is simply to give a small share of one's money to alleviate the suffering of poverty within one's neighbourhood. That does not merely testify to the great importance of social security from the Islamic point of view. It establishes a direct relationship between financial help within the community and having faith in Allah.

There are several verses in the Qur'an which specify the importance of being kind to certain groups of people. Normally when something is expected to be given to others, the order in which they are mentioned provides an order of priority. Therefore, we list the kindness to parents above kindness to travellers who find themselves stranded and cannot continue their journey without financial or other help. That is because parents are mentioned first among the group to whom we are expected to be kind. Allah says: *Worship Allah alone and do not associate any partners with Him. Be kind to your parents, your relatives, orphans, the needy, close and distant neighbours, and to your friends, and to travellers in need and to those whom your right hands possess."(4:36)* Among the qualities which make a person righteous the Qur'an includes being generous with money *to relatives, orphans, the needy, stranded wayfarers, etc. (2:177)*

As I said, this should be our guide-line in the order of priorities. The question arises whether, faced with having many of these groups in real need, one should give all help one can afford to the first in the group or should one divide that among all of them. This is a very sensitive matter to which we cannot apply a very rigid rule. The sensitivity may be on the part of the giver or the recipient. One may feel it is impossible to give all he can afford,

little though it may be, to one needy neighbour and give nothing to the other, or to give to a needy relative without giving to any [other] relatives. Therefore, every one determines for himself how to divide whatever he can give away among those who he wants to help. His judgement should take into consideration certain factors such as the closeness of the recipients, their circumstances, their strength of faith, etc.

What we are speaking about here is voluntary help, not that which is obligatory, such as zakah, not what these people, or some of them, may claim as their right. Parents are entitled to be supported by their children if they are in need. This rule applies in all situations, whether the children are barely self-sufficient or indeed poor. A poor person cannot abandon his old parents who have no source of income. He has to share with them whatever he gets.

•Consecutive Umrahs

Can one person perform a second Umrah immediately after he has finished the first one?

There is nothing to stop a person from offering another Umrah after he has finished one. However, when he finishes the Umrah, he has to release himself from *ihraam*. For the second one, he has to go to the nearest point of the "hill" area, i.e. outside the Haram area, to put on his *ihraam*. and declare his intent there. He cannot do that in Makkah itself. Maybe it is convenient for him to put on his *ihraam*. garments in Makkah, but he does not make the declaration of intent until he has gone out, at least to the nearest place outside the Haram area. The place most people prefer, is called Al-Taniem.

I think I have to explain that in normal cases, one Umrah a year is sufficient for any person. If one is visiting Makkah, whether he is coming from a far away place or from Jeddah, or Dhahran or even nearer, he needs to do only one Umrah. If he is staying in Makkah for several days, he can do the *tawaf* as frequently as he can. But you realize, that *tawaf* is considered in the same light as prayer. The only difference is that it is permissible to talk during *tawaf* while ordinary talk in prayer invalidates it. You can do one *tawaf* after another, without any restrictions. Sa'ie , the other main feature of Umrah, is not something we are encouraged to do voluntarily. We do only one sa'ie for Umrah and one for pilgrimage and we are not encouraged to repeat that sa'ie. Therefore, when we do the *tawaf* voluntarily, we are doing the part of Umrah which can be offered in voluntary worship.

•Different views given by scholars

There are often different views given - each supported by scholars. Which one to follow?

I am afraid I do not have a simple answer. The only way is to weigh up the evidence supporting each view and choose the one which you consider to be more accurate. If you are unable to do that, because you lack the knowledge necessary for that exercise, then you can only choose on the basis what have been told by a scholar [upon your asking]. As long as you are certain that the scholar you are asking is knowledgeable and God-fearing, you commit no sin by implementing the ruling he gives you, even if it is totally mistaken.

•Graves - & tombs

Whenever we visit the Prophet's mosque in Madinah and the graveyard of Al Baqie, we are directed to more than one place as the burial place of Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter. Please comment.

When people point to different spots at the burial place of Fatimah, or any particular companion of the Prophet, that is understandable. As you realize the *sunnah* which was certainly followed at the time of the Prophet is to make a grave very simple and to make its mark also simple. There is no prestige in making a great tomb for any deceased person. Simple graves are bound to be lost with the passage of time. Later generations will at best be able to point to a particular area as having been the burial place of any particular person.

May I ask, why is it so important to know the exact spot where a particular person is buried? If it is to visit his or her grave, and to pray Allah to have mercy on that person, this can be done equally well whether we know the exact spot or not. If one stands at the entrance of the graveyard and prays Allah to have mercy on all those who are buried there, it is perfectly all right. If he wants to mention them one by one, that is again appropriate. He is certainly rewarded for visiting the graveyard and for praying Allah to have mercy on those buried there. This is all we need do.

•Shares of inheritance - when there is no son

A man died leaving behind his wife, five daughters, and one brother who has two sons. How will his property be divided among them?

The first thing to be paid out of the estate of the deceased is the settlement of any debts he might have left unpaid. Secondly, his will should be executed. A Muslim may leave up to one third of his property to people other than his heirs by will. He may apportion certain parts of his property to any relatives who are not assigned shares of his inheritance according to the Islamic system. He may also wish to give away something for charity.

When this man's debts are paid and his will is executed, the remainder is divided among his heirs as follows: one eighth to his wife and two thirds to be divided equally among his five daughters. The remainder goes to his brother. In this particular case it comes to just over one fifth. His two nephews receive nothing.

•Singing

I intend to study medicine in a European or American university, but I also have a strong desire to become a heavy metal singer or a pop singer.

As I am a Muslim, I will not sing in clubs or discotheques. Nor will I drink or get involved in any of the practices which are clearly forbidden in Islam. I will continue to observe my Islamic duties, and will make much of my singing for charitable purposes.
Some people suggest that I will still be making a sin if I do so. Please comment.

Scholars differ with regard to how singing is viewed in Islam. Many say that it is permissible while others say that it is undesirable or discouraged, and still others view it as forbidden. People who have a very strict view of singing, repeat some sayings which speak of certain punishments to those who listen to singing. Such sayings, or those of them which are attributed to the Prophet, lack in authenticity. It is perhaps the weightier opinion that singing is permissible. It is the view of many scholars in the Hanbali school of thought.

To start with, singing is a natural tendency of human beings. People like a melodious voice and a pleasant tune. When the words which are sung have a beautiful and decent meaning, it is enchanting to listen to them. When we add this to the fact there is no clear statement by the Prophet which can be construed to forbid singing, we are bound to conclude that the view which permits singing is weightier.

Having said that, I must add that Islam does not encourage that singing becomes institutionalized in the sense that there are places which people may frequent in order to listen to songs, as happens in clubs and discotheques. Frequenting such places is strongly discouraged.

I commend your attitude in seeking to know the Islamic view of what you have in mind before actually doing it. This is the proper attitude of a Muslim, especially when he is embarking on something on which the Islamic view may not be immediately clear to him. I also recommend your resolution to abide by Islamic teachings and not to commit any of such practices which Islam forbids. But I still have a number of points to make in connection with what you intend to do.

I should perhaps start with explaining a principal Islamic legislation which has a far-reaching effect. This concerns lawful matters, where the verdict is changed, when the practice of such lawful matter leads to something unlawful. When there is a strong likelihood that a person gets involved in something which is in itself permissible, then we tell him that the permissible matter is no longer permitted to him because it leads to doing what is forbidden. This principle may work at individual or community levels. The permissible practice may not generally lead to anything forbidden, except in individual cases. In such a situation we say that it is forbidden to those whom it leads to do what is sinful.

I have pointed this principle out in order to ask you to consider your position after you have become a famous singer. Will not there be a strong temptation for you to sing in parties or clubs or dancing places? Will you be able to resist the inevitably numerous attempts by agents, friends, and admirers who will try to get you to change your resolution, offering in return large amounts of money, or prestige, or both?

You have also to consider the effects of your singing on your audience. If you become a pop star and produce records that have a strong appeal to teenagers in a permissive Western society, do you not think that you also bear some responsibility of what may take place in their clubs and discotheques when they dance to your music? You may not be

there singing to them, but your records will be played. Moreover, can you escape them when they hunt you at your house, in your hotels and wherever you go?

You may say that it is your firm intention not to have anything to do with all that. It may be so, but we have an important principle in Islam,which tells that it is always better to avoid any gray tea which may lead to something forbidden. The Prophet says that

> *"What is permissible is clear and what is forbidden is also clear. In between, there are some matters which are rather doubtful. He who avoids what is doubtful makes sure of staying within the bounds of his faith. He who falls in them will fall in sin. He is just like a shepherd who takes his sheep for grazing close to a restricted area: he is very likely to overstep its boundaries. Every king has a protected area of his own. Allah's protected area is that made up by what He has forbidden."*

This Hadith gives you very clear guidance Do not go near what is forbidden lest you may fall in it.

If I have a son of your age and he expresses to me the same desire as you have expressed, I am clear in my mind what advice I will give him. I will say to him that he may take up singing as a hobby which he practices himself, at home, or with his closest friends. But I will strongly discourage from taking up singing as a career. The risks are too evident to be ignored.

•Prayers delayed *[Qaz'a]*

Due to very heavy work load, I miss my prayers during the day and offer all my prayers in the evening. I call athan and iqamah for each prayer. Please comment.

Allah describes prayer in the Qur'an as a "time-related duty" which He has made obligatory to the believers. Since it is time-related, it must be offered at the appropriate time appointed for each prayer. I am afraid that a heavy workload does not provide an exemption from offering prayers on time, unless one works for an establishment which actually prevents him from offering prayers. In that case, you should try and find a job somewhere else. On the other hand, if leaving the work in hand in order to offer prayer will result in some damage to the work produced or cause harm to the company because of

delayed work, it may be pardonable to delay prayer until one has an opportunity to offer it. [Added: Certain security jobs or some jobs requiring continuous attention to safety of a plant operation may cause delay in prayers, but] This should not be [allowed to become] a daily occurrence.

One should always try to offer prayers on time. In cases of emergency, one may pray Dhuhr and Asr together, and Maghrib and Isha together. Again this should not become a habit. When one offers such prayers together, one calls one athan for all of them and says an iqamah for each prayer.

•Sitting position during the prayers

Is there any regulation about how to stand in congregationai prayer? People also sit in different positions during prayer. What is the right one?

All positions which people use when they sit during prayer are permissible. However, it is recommended in the last sitting of a prayer consisting of three or four rak'ahs to bring ones left leg under the right one and allow one's left hip to be in contact with the ground. When you stand up in congregational prayer you must make sure that the row in which you stand is straight. Each row begins in the middle, right behind the imam, and worshippers should stand on both the right and left sides of the imam. They stand shoulder to shoulder to make their rows straight. It is permissible to drink or pass water when you are standing, although we are recommended to sit down before we drink.

•Remarriage of a Christian couple becoming Muslim

If a Christian couple become Muslim, do they have to be married anew under Islamic law?

At the time of Prophet, people embraced Islam either as individuals or as married couples. The Prophet never asked anyone of them to have a fresh marriage contract, even when there was a gap of time between their embracing Islam. In other words, even when a man or a woman became a Muslim and his or her marriage partner had not, the marriage was left in abeyance. When the partner became Muslim, he or she was united with his or her spouse with a new marriage contract. Therefore, if a married couple who do do not belong to any faith become Muslims, their marriage is considered valid from the Islamic point of view, unless the marriage itself cannot be sanctioned by Islam. This proviso applies in the

case of the marriage of brothers and sisters, uncles and nieces,.etc. which may be acceptable in certain societies. In such cases, the marriage is nullified. If only one spouse becomes a Muslim, the marriage is considered to be suspended for the duration of a waiting period. If the other becomes a Muslim in that period, the marriage is considered to be still in force. If the waiting period lapses, then the marriage is nullified if it is the woman who has become a Muslim, or if the man becomes a Muslim and the wife belongs to any religion other than Christianity or Judaism.

•Status of an imam [or a maulvi] for Marriage

When I married my wife, she was a Christian. The witness to the marriage were my sister, her husband and the imam who took care of the formal contract of marriage. I did not ask the consent of her parents, since they wanted us to get married in the presence of a priest or a judge, which I declined. Later, my wife became a Muslim. Now we have three children. In view of the requirement of a woman's guardian to be present when the marriage contract is made, I would like to know whether my marriage is valid.

From what I gather from your letter, your wife's parents were willing to attend to your marriage contract, if it was done by a priest or a judge. Perhaps you would have been well advised to grant their wish and have the marriage officiated by a judge, even if he would not have been a Muslim. If you have enough Muslim witnesses, i.e. a minimum of two, then the marriage would have been perfectly valid. However, you did not wish to do that and wanted an imam to officiate. Let me tell you that in Islam, an imam does not have any particular status, except that given to him by his knowledge of Islam. Therefore, anyone who knows the rules of marriage and how a marriage contract should be done can make the marriage. Indeed, the marriage can be done without the presence of any such person, if the two parties concerned i.e. the husband and the wife's guardian know how to make the commitment and acceptance which are necessary for the marriage contract to be concluded.

I see no point for you to be worried about the validity of your marriage. It is certainly valid, since it has had enough witnesses. The imam himself should be considered your wife's guardian because at that particular time, she could have no guardian. You may be sure that there is no question about the validity of your marriage.

•Father's pilgrimage

You have mentioned that a Muslim is not obliged by duty to take his wife to pilgrimage. Does the same apply to one's father? A friend of mine says that he has sent money to his father to help him offer the pilgrimage. Need he not have done so?

As I have explained, pilgrimage is an individual duty. If a person meets the conditions of ability to offer the pilgrimage, then it is a duty incumbent on him. If he is unable to offer the pilgrimage, that duty does not apply to him. An Islamic duty is not made dependent upon someone else. Otherwise, we will be accountable to Allah for that over which we have no control. Allah is too merciful to put us in such a difficult position.

In the case of a father and son, if the father does not himself meet the conditions of ability to offer the pilgrimage, the duty does not apply to him. If he dies without offering pilgrimage, Allah will not hold him to account for any omission. However, the case of his son being able to bear the expenses of his pilgrimage is not of dutifulness. A person may argue that he is not required to fulfil the religious duties of his father. But is he? *The Prophet was asked once by one of his companions whether he should offer the pilgrimage on behalf of his father who died before completing that duty. The Prophet asked him: "Had your father left some debts unpaid, would you pay them on his behalf?" When the son answered in the affirmative, the Prophet said: "A debt owed to Allah has a better claim to be paid."* This Hadith show clearly that a son is responsible to settle his father's debts. If a son is required to offer the pilgrimage on behalf of his father after his death, then it stands to reason that helping a father offer the pilgrimage himself is far better. Not only would he be bringing happiness to his father, but also he will benefit by his father's supplication to Allah in the Haram and in Arafat and the other places to help, protect and be pleased with his son. A parent's prayer is certainly answered. Moreover, the son would earn the meritorious position of being dutiful.

•A woman's dower - deferred payment

How much should a man pay in dower at the present time? When and how should it be paid? What is the result of its non-payment or delayed payment? How is a husband who refuses to pay the dower penalized?

There is no fixed amount for a woman's dower. Normally, its amount is agreed upon by the husband and his prospective wife's guardian. Her guardian should consult her before

consenting to the marriage. A dower may be in cash or kind and it may be the realization of some benefit to the prospective wife. The Prophet asked one of his companions who wanted to get married, how much he could afford in dower. When he learnt that the man did not have any money, the Prophet asked him whether he had learnt any parts of Qur'an. When the man answered that he knew certain surahs, the Prophet sanctioned the marriage on the basis that the husband would teach his wife those surahs. That was her dower.

In another incident, a man called Abu Talhah proposed to a Muslim woman. At that time he was not a Muslim. She said to him: you are not one to be rejected, but as you are a non-believer, a marriage between us is impossible. If you accept Islam, I will take that as dower and will ask you nothing more. The man became a Muslim and the Prophet sanctioned the marriage. His companions considered that she had the best dower of all. That is certainly true because by her marriage, she won a good man to Islam.

Normally, the dower is paid by the husband to his prospective wife before the marriage contract is made. Its amount is specified in the contract. The payment of the whole of the dower or any part of it may be deferred. If the dower is not paid before the marriage contract is made, it remains a debt owed to the woman by her husband. It does not affect the validity of the marriage. As long as the husband acknowledges his wife's right to her dower, and is willing to pay it should she demand payment, there is nothing wrong in delaying payment. If he defaults on payment, when a demand is made, the case may be put to a court of Islamic law which will immediately order the man to pay. In this case it is treated as a debt which is unpaid. Everything that applied to debts applies to unpaid dower. When the husband dies, his wife may claim her deferred dower from his estate and its payment is given priority since such priority is given to all debts left outstanding by the deceased.

I realize that in certain societies the dower is considered as a formality. It is specified but not paid and the bride is required to declare that she has forgone her right to it. Such a practice is unacceptable from the Islamic point of view.
[Added: The agreement to pay as dower a sum of money so high that it may be apparent that the prospective husband will never be able to pay such an amount, would be far from realistic and thus lose its sanctity. The husband knows from day one that he never will pay the dower. Such a position is not acceptable to Islam. Likewise, a meagre sum of money agreed between the parties, as is done by certain communities when they fix a paltry sum of money as dower, purely as a custom, without any specific consideration, is also unrealistic and would amount to considering it only a formality. This is also unacceptable to

Islam. Dower is a serious matter. The fixation of dower should be realistic, meaningful and acceptable to both the parties .]

•Supplication & Prayer through an intermediary
In my home country, there are tombs of dead scholars who are considered to be in a favoured position with Allah. People visit their graves to request them to recommend to Allah to accomplish any need or to solve any problem which they may have. Recently, I objected to this practice when it was suggested by a member of my family. However, a relative has given me the following reply:

"From my experience of religious activists and company with scholars and religious intellectuals, I believe that such past devotees get a special position given them by Allah. We should not ask them to give us anything, but rather ask them to recommend to Allah to grant our wishes. On the basis of my Islamic studies and company of Islamic intellectuals I believe in media through whom Allah accomplishes what He wants.That is analogous to what happens in practice, when you seek the help of a doctor to get treatment for an illness, and when you use your hand to eat. The doctor and the hand are media through which Allah's will is accomplished. Similarly, Allah's revelations were given to the Prophet through the medium of Gabriel, the angel. Likewise those past devotees are a medium to grant us our wishes. It is easy for Allah to cure our illness without the help of a doctor, in the same way as He could have given His revelations to the Prophet without using an angel. If we were to ask those devotees to accomplish something, then that is a form of polytheism, but we are asking them to recommend to Allah to accomplish what we wish."

As a result of this argument, I got very confused. I will be grateful if you comment on this and explain what is the actual role of such devotees.

What I find intriguing in your relative's argument is the fact that he tries to give it a scholarly colour, attributing it to his studies and companionship with scholars. He, however, does not support his argument with any verse from the Qur'an or any Hadith of the Prophet. As you realize, in all religious matters, the source of argument must be derived from the Qur'an and Hadith.

Your relative speaks of his companionship with scholars, but does he really mean scholars in the sense that these people have studied Islam in depth and achieve a position of renown in Islamic scholarship? If so, he should have referred you to their works which would have provided a more convincing answer. He does not, however, refer you to any such works. Instead, he supports his argument with his own personal experience. Can somebody else's experience be sound basis for the formulation of our beliefs? I find that in conflict with the Islamic approach. It is indeed the Christian way of thinking. Christians always speak about saying their experience with others in order to preach their faith. But your experience can never give me the same feelings as yours or help me arrive at the same conclusions. Furthermore, when you realize that the same experience can have totally different effects on people, you are bound to conclude that experience is not sufficient to propagate beliefs. In Islam, we have the fundamentals of our faith clearly stated in the Qur'an and elaborated and stressed by the Prophet. When we want to explain our faith to someone, we resort to the Qur'an and the sunnah and we may later supplement the principle with examples of what we may have experienced.

The examples presented by your relative are of little value. What he implies is that a medium is essential for the accomplishment of any task, even eating. He considers that using our hands is such a medium That is not true. The basic thing in human life is that things come into being as a result of effort. No one can satisfy his hunger without doing the action of eating. That fits perfectly with the concept of action and reward in the hereafter. A person who makes the effort of eating gets the necessary nourishment and survives. Similarly, the one who takes the trouble of doing good things receives reward in the hereafter. The more conscientious he is in doing his Islamic duties, the closer he draws to Allah and the sooner his wishes are granted. That is part of his reward in this life. According to your friend, the mere companionship of a devout person achieves similar results. He forgets that such company does not involve any action. In actual fact, he is requesting those devotees to intercede on his behalf.

From another point of view, a doctor is not the medium of curing illness. Otherwise, you would have had to go to the doctor for any complaint, even a headache. When you have a headache, you take a couple of pain killer tablets. A short while later, your headache

disappears. Had your relative spoken of medicines, rather than medical people as the agent of cure, his argument might have been more consistent. To him doctor is the medium, which is not true.

As for the medium of sending down divine revelations, you must not forget that a revelation is a very unique experience. It cannot be compared to ordinary human activities.

What we have to consider now is whether such devotees have any role to play after their death. Let us first consider: how does a person acquire this position after his death and how do we know it? If the answer to this question is that his action in his life elevates him to such a position, then we are appointing ourselves as judges of people. We must not forget that Allah alone is the judge, because He knows every action and what was in the person's mind before embarking on such an action. . When the Prophet heard one woman of his own household saying about a person who had just passed away: He is not in a happier place than this life, the Prophet asked her point blank: "How do you know? I am Allah's Messenger and I do not know what He will do to me in the hereafter."Judgement on people's lives and actions is something that Allah has reserved for Himself.How can we claim for certain that any person had the right intention behind every single one of actions? Until we attain that sort of certainty, we cannot judge the fate of others.

When people visit the grave of someone in order to ask him, or his spirit, to recommend to Allah to grant us wishes, do they think that the dead person recognizes them, or hears them, or knows the likely results of granting their wishes? If we answer in the affirmative, then we are claiming that the dead person is given something superior to what living people have. Otherwise, on what basis would he recommend to Allah to grant us our wishes?

Furthermore, what need is there for such recommendation? Is it needed by Allah or by ourselves? Do not people realize that Allah knows everything about them? If they do their supplications to Him directly and earnestly, believing that He alone can grant their wishes then what use is the recommendation of the dead people. Can anyone claim that Allah needs such a recommendation in order to decide whom He should help? To entertain such a thought even for the briefest of moments is a great affront to Allah. Allah tells us in the Qur'an: " *Pray to me and I will answer your prayers.*" When we pray to Allah to do something for us, we are actually declaring that He is our Lord and the Lord of all worlds. This declaration , when meant seriously and honestly, is sufficient to get our prayers

answered. Indeed, Allah answers the prayers of those who do not believe in Him, if they turn to him in sincerity. This is because of the fact that at the moment when they pray to Him, they make a declaration of recognition of his Lordship. This being the case, what use is an intermediary?
From another point of view, those devout people are dead. Let us not forget the authentic Hadith which tell us :"When a human being dies, all his actions come to an absolute end except in one of three ways: a continuous act of charity, a useful contribution to knowledge or a dutiful child who prays for him. "If you examine this Hadith carefully, you realize that we are in a position to benefit the dead by praying for them, while they are in no position to benefit us.

There is no question about it. When a person visits a tomb of a dead person and asks the deceased to intercede with Allah on his behalf, he is guilty of associating partners with Allah. He is making that dead person a deity, on a junior or senior level. That cannot be countenanced in any way. That is direct opposition to the teachings of the Prophet who has taught us to worship Allah alone and to purge our thoughts, concepts and practices of all traces of polytheism.

•Greetings on Christmas, etc.

Back home, the followers of three religions live side by side: Muslims, Christians and Hindus. In any feast of any community, members of the two other communities congratulate those who have the festivity. For example, Hindus and Christians come and greet us on the occasion of Eid, and we congratulate Christians at Christmas and so on. Some people protest saying that this is unacceptable. Please comment.

Islam is keen on maintaining good relations with neighbouring communities. It is clearly stated in the Qur'an that Allah likes us to be kind to those of the followers of other religions who do not try to fight us or turns us away from our land. And He loves those who are fair. It is only those who are hostile to us and who try to turn us out of our land with whom we are not allowed to have kindly relations. When different religious communities live peacefully together, it follows that they should congratulate each other on happy occasions. There is nothing wrong in that, nor is it forbidden to partake of their food unless we know that they slaughter their animals in a way which Islam forbids [Added: or if the food offered is otherwise forbidden by Islam.]

Islam goes further than that and imposes on the Muslims a duty to defend those non-Muslims who live peacefully under its fold. If they are attacked by a foreign power, we should help them repel it. [Added: Greeting them on their religious festivities or feasting with them is one thing, but Muslims should not, on their own, celebrate religious occasions of the non-Muslims.]

•Pilgrimage with zakah money

Can pilgrimage be performed with zakah money? Many people back home ask for zakah funds to pay for their pilgrimage.

One of the purposes of zakah funds is that mentioned under the heading "for the service of Allah's cause," which is included among the beneficiaries of zakah. Scholars have interpreted this as to help those who fight for Allah's cause and those who want to travel to pilgrimage. With this view in mind, it is permissible for a person to receive zakah money in order to meet *some* of the expenses of his pilgrimage journey.

Having said that, I must point out that pilgrimage is obligatory only to a person who is able to undertake the journey. The conditions of ability include financial status. A person who does not have enough money to pay for his journey and to maintain his family during his absence is unable to make the pilgrimage. Therefore, the duty of pilgrimage does not apply to him.

•Ablution and physical contact

If a man touches or comes into physical contact with his wife or another woman, does this invalidate his ablution?

According to the Shaf'ie school of thought, any touch or physical contact between a man and a woman he is eligible to marry, including his wife, invalidates ablution when their skins get into touch. If either has a cover over the place where the contact is made, then this ruling does not apply. Other schools of thought do not agree.

The Hanafi school does not consider such contact as enough to invalidate any ablution. There are further details in other schools of thought distinguishing one sort of contact from another. When the touch is an accidental or a normal touch, then there is no

question that the ablution remains valid. If the touch is accompanied by sexual thoughts or arouses feelings of a certain type, then it does invalidate ablution. It is certainly better to follow a middle course. I am, therefore, more inclined to say that normal everyday contact between a man and his wife does not invalidate ablution.

[Added: There should be no physical contact between a man and a woman he is eligible to marry, other than his wife, in any case - ablution or no ablution.]

•Inheritance of a woman's property

How is a deceased woman's property divided among her heirs, if she has left behind her husband, children, brothers and sisters as well as her parents?

Each one of the deceased woman's parents receives one sixth of her property. Her husband inherits one quarter, since she has children, whether by him or through an earlier marriage. The remainder of her property goes to her children and it is distributed between them on the basis of equal shares [i.e. equal shares are made for convenience of disbursement]. Every daughter inherits one share while every son inherits two shares.

It should be pointed out that such a division can only take place after the payment of any debt which she may not have paid and the execution of any will which she might have left. It should be pointed out that a Muslim may bequeath by will up to one third of his property. No one of his heirs may be left anything by will. The rest must be divided among his or her heirs.

•Swimming for a young girl

My husband insists that our daughter, aged five, should learn swimming, although the only available facility is in a co-education class of children in the age group 4-8. He also wants her to attend gymnastic classes. He believes that girls should learn these sports, especially as we are living in the United States, with little prospect of returning to our Muslim home country. I have tried to persuade him to change his mind without any

success. Could you please explain whether it is permissible for my young girl to attend such classes? If so, until what age?

This is a question which can be answered in a few sentences. However, I feel that it raises a number of points which merit a more relaxed discussion.

The first is which religious duties are applicable to children. As you are well aware, the imposition of duties is closely related, from the Islamic point of view, to the concept of reckoning and reward in the hereafter. Obviously, the concept of reward or punishment being dependent on the fulfillment or negligence of duty presupposes not merely the availability of choice but also the ability to choose. This ability depends on the degree of maturity a person attains before he makes his choice. In Islam, religious duties do not apply, for example, to a person who is insane. Consequently, reward and punishment cannot be applicable to him. Similarly, children who have not yet attained the age of puberty are not answerable for the fulfillment of any Islamic duty. A child remains a child, and his or her sense of duty is not mature enough until adolescence. Even the adolescents vary in their maturity and ability to judge and choose. However, there must always be a dividing line which separates one stage from another. With regard to the applicability of religious duties, this dividing line is considered the attainment of puberty. What this means in effect is that no Muslim child is required to observe the duty of fasting in Ramadan before he or she attains puberty. If he offers the pilgrimage, he is rewarded for it, but that does not fulfil the pilgrimage duty which becomes applicable to him after he has attained puberty. This applies to all duties and prohibitions. If a child commits something forbidden, he is not punished for it in the same way as an adult. He may be reproached or even punished, (depending on the violation of which he is guilty), but the level of punishment is not the same as that of an adult who is guilty of the same violation.

Having said that, I should add that we must always strive to bring up our children in such a way that helps them fulfil their Islamic duties when these become applicable to them. It is for this reason that the Prophet teaches us that we must get our children to start offering prayer when they are seven. When they become ten, we may punish them for neglecting prayer. We should also train them to fast so that when fasting becomes required of them they do not find it too hard. This again applies to the wide spectrum of Islamic duties. We should inculcate in our children all proper Islamic values so that they develop a good Islamic sense which helps them to always choose the Islamic way.

A Muslim parent should always try to establish a good balance between these two considerations. While trying to inculcate in his children the love of Islamic values and

duties, he should not impose on them a rigid attitude which may cause them to associate the fact that they are Muslims with being deprived of certain pleasures. The fact is that most social activities are permissible in Islam, although there may be certain restrictions on how they are used. For example, swimming is not merely permissible but also required to be taught to children. Yet, communal swimming when men and women use a beach or a swimming pool at the same time, wearing only swimming costumes, is forbidden. But when men and women use the swimming pool separately and they observe Islamic values, there is nothing wrong with their swimming.

The Prophet describes this religion of Islam as"easy". Allah has not made it so in order that people do not find it too difficult to implement. He says: "This religion is made facile, therefore approach it gently. No one will try to pull this religion toward rigidity without being defeated." When you examine religious duties and requirements you are bound to conclude that ease is the very characteristic of this faith. Rigidity is alien to it. Nevertheless, people continue to impose too many restrictions on themselves and their families, oblivious of the fact that rigidity is more likely to be counter-productive.

I knew a very good person who was studying in Europe, and who had two young daughters, aged eight and six. Wherever they went, his daughters were wearing the full Islamic dress required of adult Muslim women. I spoke to him about this and suggested that the young girls may find their dress too much of a burden. He explained that he wanted them to get used to dress in Islamic way. My discussion with him was unproductive. I tried hard to persuade him that he exposed his family to the danger of his daughters becoming rebellious when they grow older, feeling that the rigidity to which they had been exposed in their childhood has deprived them of many childhood pleasures.

Maintaining a balanced view, I do not think that there is anything wrong with your five-year-old learning swimming with a co-ed class of her age group. Attending a gymnastic class may be very useful as well. You should not forget that the Prophet has emphasized that swimming is an art we should teach to our children. There is nothing in the Hadith which indicates that this is limited to boys. A girl may benefit much by learning swimming.

However, you should begin to make her gradually aware that a grown up woman must never wear a swimming costume in front of men. When she is closer to the age of puberty, you can make sure that she never swims except in a 'woman-only' surrounding.

•Contraception & sterilization

I have four children and I am considering resorting to a sterilization operation to be done for my wife. She is thin and weak and can hardly cope with the demands of the family, especially during my prolonged absence, away from home to work here in Saudi Arabia. May I also say that my financial situation is not that bright. Indeed, I can hardly cope with the great demands placed on me.

Let us first of all deal with the financial aspect of this question. We know that Allah provides sustenance for everyone of His creation. I personally have experienced an improvement in my financial level with every child I have had. Indeed, that improvement was very tangible in the case of one of my children. Some people may not have such a tangible experience. It is true to say, however, that Allah will not neglect to provide sustenance for any human being. It is up to the breadwinner of the family to make use of the opportunities that Allah provides for him.

Having said that, I should also point out before attending to the question on sterilization that resorting to methods of contraceptions which are safe and do not affect the health of the mother is permissible. That must be kept at the individual level. By this I mean that a family may resort to contraception in order to limit the number of their children if they determine that such a thing is desirable in their particular circumstances. At the time of the Prophet, some of his companions resorted to coitus interruptus, which was the only method of family planning known to them, and the Prophet was aware of what they did. He did not instruct them to stop, nor did he tell them that what they did was forbidden. Therefore, it is permissible. Other methods of family planning have the same verdict provided they are safe.

Sterilization which involves a surgical operation is a special case. Unlike other methods of contraception it is permanent. Therefore it has to be viewed separately. Preventing pregnancy by surgery is known as sterilization which can be performed for either the husband or the wife. It is perhaps more accurate to say that we cannot make a general, sweeping statement in order to say that such an operation is either forbidden or permissible.

Any surgery may be considered, from the strictly religious point of view, as required, recommended, discouraged or forbidden, according to the different circumstances of its person. If a highly competent doctor advises his patient that a certain operation will not

only cure his illness but also prevent a speedy deterioration of his case, which is otherwise inevitable, then we can say that the operation is recommended. On the other hand, if there are no strong medical grounds for operating on a certain patient, but the doctor advises the operation only to get his fee, then the doctor commits a sin by giving such an advice.

In the case of sterilization, what we have to look for is the effect of pregnancy on the health of the mother. If a competent doctor determines that every pregnancy is likely to pose a real threat to the life of the mother or to cause serious threats to her health and that other methods of contraception may also have a bad effect on her health, then the woman may have such an operation without any qualm of conscience. It is permissible in her case. On the other hand, for a woman who asks her doctor to perform such an operation because she feels that a pregnancy may spoil her figure or having children may stop her from taking a lengthy holiday every few months, such an operation is forbidden.

In your particular condition, I do not think the reasons you have advanced for such an operation constitute a sound argument to justify the operation. Your wife may be thin and weak, but you can easily delay pregnancy by resorting to other methods of contraception. On the basis of what you say in your letter, you are only with your wife for a month or so every year. If you take adequate precautions, you can almost certainly prevent pregnancy. Therefore, the operation is not required on medical grounds.

Hence, it cannot be lawful in your case.

•What is in heaven for women

Many a Qur'anic statement describes the life of men in heaven, but there is nothing to describe the status of women there. Men are said to live in heaven with their wives and sons, but how will women live?

The Prophet describes heaven in the following terms :

> *"There is in it what no eye has even seen, things of which no ear has ever heard and what no one has ever imagined."*

If we try to relate this Hadith to the description of heaven in the Qur'an we conclude that although the Qur'anic description is true and accurate, it is given in terms which are familiar to us. The reality is far happier and much more enjoyable than we can imagine.

The Prophet says: *"Women are the sisters of men."* This Hadith means that women have equal status with men and, with regard to religious duties and rights, they enjoy the same treatment. What this means in effect is that every type of enjoyment which is promised in the Qur'an to believers applies both to men and women in equal measure. Women do not have any lower status, nor are they neglected nor treated in an inferior way. Read if you will Verse 35 of Surah 33, entitled "The Confederates," or *"Al-Ahzab"*. It may be rendered in translation as follows:

> *"For all men and women who have surrendered themselves to Allah, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who humble themselves before Allah, and all men and women who give in charity, and all men and women who fast, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, and all men and women who remember Allah unceasingly: for all of them Allah has indeed readied forgiveness of sins and a great reward."*

It is well known that with regard to religious duties, men and women are alike. Hence, their reward must be alike in order to maintain justice between them. Likewise, what they may receive in heaven must be the same.

When the Qur'an speaks of wives for believers in heaven, this need not be understood in terms of marriage in this world. If a married couple are good believers and both of them are admitted to heaven, they will be together in heaven. The woman's happiness will not be jeopardized by her husband having wives from among the women of heaven. That sort of marriage is only for companionship. The women will also have companions and will live in endless bliss.

•Fasting in Shawwal

After the completion of fasting in Ramadan, is it obligatory to observe the fast for six days in the month of Shawwal?

No, but it is recommended to fast six days after the end of Ramadan, provided we do not begin with the first day of Shawwal which is the day of Eid. The recommendation is particularly significant. As you know, Allah rewards a good deed with at least ten times its value. Therefore, when you fast in the month of Ramadan, you have the reward of fasting

ten months. If you follow that with fasting for six days, then you have the reward of fast for sixty days, which is equivalent to two months. This means that your reward is equivalent to that of fasting of the whole year. If you do this year after year, then Allah stores for you the reward of fasting throughout your life.

•Polygamy and the right of wives

When a women learns of her husband intending a second marriage, is it permissible for her to tell him that he may not bring his second wife in her home and that he must provide a second accommodation for her. Can she say that even when her husband has only a small house provided to him by the company and he has only a limited income which may not be sufficient to keep two houses? Can he choose a Christian woman for his second wife?

Islam views marriage as a relationship between human beings. Therefore, the rights and privileges as well as the feelings and emotions of each partner in this relationship must be taken into consideration. Since the woman is the weaker partner in a marriage relationship, Islam has taken care to ensure that her rights are respected. When a man defaults on his duties towards his wife, this constitutes sufficient ground for the nullification of the marriage, if an Islamic court determines that the situation cannot be mended. Such annulification can be enforced despite the objections of the defaulting husband.

Every married woman is entitled to have a decent home of the standard to which women in her social status are accustomed. If she agrees to marry a man of limited income, she implicitly consents to have a home of the standard her husband can afford. Whatever may be the family circumstances, her right to a decent home is undeniable. This is part of something greater to which she is also entitled by right, namely, a family atmosphere based on care, affection and compassion. In short, a homely life.

It is well known that Islam allows a man to marry up to four wives at a time. When a man intends to marry a second wife, it is not obligatory that he should seek or obtain his first wife's consent. But she remains entitled to all her rights and privileges. The second wife also enjoys similar rights. Both of them are entitled to equal standard. He cannot, say, give one of them a detached two-story villa with a garden and accommodate the other in a small

apartment in a large block of flats. If he does that, then he is guilty of unfair and unequal treatment.

When we consider this very carefully, we realize that it is the duty of any man who intends to marry a second wife to make sure that he can support both of them on an equal basis. The Qur'anic instruction is very clear: "If you fear that you may not treat them equally, then limit yourself to one (wife)." It may so happen that a married man finds himself deep in love with another woman and she consents to be his wife, knowing that he is of limited means. He should reflect, however, that marriage is not a temporary arrangement. He must never overlook his duties toward his first wife, or indeed the second.

The first question he should ask himself is whether he would be able to maintain two homes. It is not lawful for a man who has married two women to force them to live in the same house, whether it is big or small, unless both of them agree to that arrangement without coercion. This is due to the fact that in such circumstances it is only natural for them to harbour feelings of jealousy and hostility toward each other. Each of them will be always on the watch, trying to discover any sign of favouritism which her husband shows toward his other wife. That will inevitably lead to endless quarrels and the atmosphere in the family home will be unhealthy for the upbringing of the children. Moreover, why should a wife be exposed to such a situation which enhances ill-feelings. On the basis of this, it is perfectly legitimate for the first wife to tell her husband when he embarks on a second marriage that he must not at any time enforce on her the burden of sharing her home with his second wife. If she makes that clear to him and he nevertheless tries to impose it, then this constitutes a basis for the nullification of the marriage, if she so desires. She will be entitled to all her rights.

Having said that, I realize that not every woman who finds herself in such a situation would like to have her marriage nullified. A wife may still be young and she may have young children who need to have both their parents around. She may have no feasible alternative. If she gets her marriage nullified, she may face the problem of being separated from her children. Many a woman would sacrifice her happiness in order to stay with her children. Therefore, it is only right that a woman is given the freedom of choice with regard to the type of home she may have when her husbands marries a second or a third wife. As I have already said, a man may not force his two wives to share one house without their consent. If both of them agree to such sharing, they are forgoing part of their right and this must be on the basis of free choice.

A husband may arrange for both his wives to have separat rooms in one house only if such is the nature of housing people in the same social status as his wives have. If, for example, a man's wife comes from a family which shares her home with another family, then such a shared accommodation is the type of her equals. He may, then, ask her to have separate rooms in a house which she shares with his other wife.

When we consider all this, we find that in the case the (lady) reader cites, the husband will be ill-advised to marry a second wife. His company is unlikely to give him a second home for the second wife. Therefore, he will have to rent a flat for her which will constitute a heavy financial burden and will take a considerable portion of his income. If he is thinking of getting both his wives to share his small accommodation, he is depriving both of them of their rights. As we have said, he cannot do that unless both of them freely consent.

What we have also to consider is that Islam allows polygamy only as a solution to social problems. When a man is happy with his family life with his first wife, he should not think of marrying again. His own happiness is at stake. Having said that, it is perhaps valid to say that a man does not normally think of a second marriage, if he is happy with his first wife. When a woman finds herself threatened with the prospect of having to share her husband with another woman, she should examine her situation very carefully and think whether her husband is motivated to take such a step by the lack of happiness in the family home. Perhaps she may do something about that to ensure that everyone of her family is leading a happy life.

The other point the lady reader raises is whether it is permissible for a man who is married to a Muslim wife to choose a Christian for his second wife. The answer is that it is permissible, but far from recommended. What we have also to understand is that Islam may permit certain things but it advises its followers against resorting to them. We know that divorce is permissible, but is one legal thing which Allah dislikes most. Allah would not have allowed it, had it not been for the fact that there is a certain social need for its legality.

The same applies to marrying a woman who adheres to another faith. The problems which may arise in such a marriage are enormous, but it has been legalized nevertheless because there are circumstances which make it the most practical solution.

•Meat of animals slaughtered in non-Muslim states

1. When slaughtering a chicken, a Muslim who is doing the slaughter is helped by a non-Muslim who holds the chicken. Is the meat permissible to eat?

2. Is the meat of animals slaughtered by Christians and Jews permissible to eat, even though they may not slaughter their animals in the manner recommended by Islam? If during the slaughter, the head of an animal gets separated from the body completely by accident, is that animal permissible to eat?

3. Is it permissible for a Muslim living in a non-Muslim country to eat the meat of animals slaughtered according to the prevailing method there? Can a Muslim eat meat prepared by Christians, Jews, etc., if he finds that necessary as in the case of a student living on a university campus and having often to eat at the cafeteria?

1. Such a chicken is permissible to eat, provided that the slaughterer observes the Islamic rules. He should mention the name of Allah and, using a very sharp blade, should cut the main arteries in the neck of the animal to help it lose consciousness immediately and thus reduce its pain to a minimum. The fact that the one who holds the chicken for him is non-Muslim does not affect the situation in any way.

2. If the Christians and Jews slaughter their animals in the method recommended by the Bible, then they will be following the same method as Muslims. Jews still do this, but Christians have introduced new methods as stunning by electric shock. The stunning is used in order to make the animal totally unconscious when it is slaughtered. In the case of large animals, such as sheep and beef [cattle], the animal regains consciousness within a minute or two, unless it is slaughtered in the meantime. Therefore, the meat of such animals is permissible to eat. With chicken, it is likely that the animal dies as a result of the electric shock. It is, therefore, far more preferable to avoid eating chicken killed by Christians in Europe. In Muslim countries, Christian butchers use generally the same methods as Muslims. Therefore, it is permissible to buy meat from them.

There is nothing wrong with the meat of an animal whose head is, by accident totally separated from its body during slaughter, provided that the Islamic rules are followed from the beginning. What is important is the mentioning of Allah's name at the time of slaughter.

3. Allah tells us in the Qur'an that we eat of the good of Christians and Jews as well as other people whom He favoured with revelations. Therefore, unless there is a specific reason for the prohibition of a particular type of food prepared by such people, it is permissible to eat. In the case of Jews, they slaughter animals in the same way as we do. Christians, especially in Western Europe and America, have adopted different methods of slaughter. Scholars have different opinion on whether such meat is permissible for Muslims to eat. However, in such a matter there is no harm in choosing the easier option, since it is supported by sound arguments advanced by learned scholars.

A Muslim who finds himself living in a Christian country, such as those of Western Europe, needs to familiarize himself with the methods of slaughter prevailing in that country. If he determines that the animals killed for eating are not dead before they are finally slaughtered, he may eat their meat after mentioning the name of Allah. If he finds out that the stunning operation which is normally adopted in many of these countries actually kills the animal, he should not eat its meat. In most cases, the large animals, such as sheep, beef [cattle], etc. are only stunned by electric shock which affects them for a short period while they are slaughtered. This is done in order to make the slaughter painless. That is acceptable from the Islamic point of view. Smaller animals, such as chicken, may be more suspicious, because it is often the case that the chicken dies before it is slaughtered. In that case it becomes carrion which is forbidden to eat.

•Setting off interest against interest

Sometimes an individual may find himself having some money which he can deposit in a bank, and he may have borrowed a loan to finance the purchase of his house. Is it permissible to use the interest paid to him on these deposits in order to pay off some of the interest charged on the house purchase loan?

There is no doubt that the argument for setting off interest earned against interest incurred appears to be strong and valid. However, the person who does this, get involved in two interest-based operations. He is actually taking interest from the bank and paying it

again to the bank. In other words, he deals with interest twice. That is a case of double prohibition.

While there may be some compelling reasons for a person to get a loan to finance the purchase of a house, there is no compelling reason for him to earn interest by putting his money in a deposit account. If one has already bought a house on mortgage and he is paying interest to a bank, he should try to arrive at an arrangement whereby he can put money in the mortgage account above the regular instalments and draw it again at a subsequent date. I realize that banks do not like to do that because of the increased administrative costs to them, but if you have an understanding bank manager and you explain to him the situation from the Islamic point of view, he may allow you to do so. This will mean that the bank will charge you less interest when you have put some money in your mortgage account. The interest will increase when you draw some of what you have deposited. In this way, the bank is making the set off directly and you are not involved in taking interest; you are only paying it.

[Added: Apparently, the bank manager may be forced by the prevailing practices to refuse such a facility. In such a case, one should indulge only in paying interest without resorting to collecting interest. That is the least he can do to avoid double prohibition.]

•Spending interest

The interest we receive from the bank on our deposit we distribute to the poor as charity. We are unable to act on the suggestion that such interest could be used to provide public services such as toilets, cemeteries, etc. The only way is to distribute it to the poor. Your suggestion requires that many people should share in its implementation by paying the interest they may receive into a special account for the purpose of building public services. Please advise.

I feel that a Muslim should not go to a bank to open an interest earning account, with the intention of spending the interest he receives in charity. To resort to such an arrangement is bound to give him the false feeling of satisfaction that he is doing his share in alleviating the effects of poverty on others. What he has to understand is that interest, and all usury for that matter, is foul. Allah accepts only what is good. With regard to money, that means what is earned with one's work and effort.

It is true that individuals cannot get involved in providing public services. The interest they receive on their deposit is too small for that purpose. However, they can pay that amount to a society which may be engaged in such work. One could give it to the municipal authority to encourage it to provide such services.

I have also suggested that this interest may be given to any Islamic relief organization which is working in the famine- or disaster-stricken areas of the Muslim world. Muslim Aid of Britain and the Islamic Relief Agency in Sudan are two such organizations. [Added: or the Edhi Trust in Pakistan.] I would hesitate before approving the payment of interest directly by one who receives it to a poor person. I am not keen on that at all. The whole situation is a false one. The poor person feels very grateful to someone who is giving him something which he does not own. That is absurd.

•A simple marriage

I intend to get married and my parents are trying to arrange that for me. My desire is to have my marriage conducted in the simple Islamic way. How should I go about it?

It is highly commendable that you wish your marriage to be free from all the customs which have been introduced in order to maintain appearances and try to preserve the position of the two families in the society. That is certainly not one of the purposes of marriage according to Islam.

The marriage contract is made simply by a commitment and an acceptance. The guardian of the bride commits himself to marrying her to the bridegroom if the agreed conditions are met, and the bridegroom accepts that commitment which means that he is prepared to honour those conditions. A certain amount of dower is fixed between the two parties and this becomes payable at the moment when the contract is made. If both parties agree, payment of the whole amount or any part of it can be deferred.

When that has taken place, the marriage is made. The wedding can take place at any time, and indeed the bride and the bridegroom can join together in their new family home without a wedding party, if they so wish. The contract, which is witnessed at least by two persons, is sufficient. However, publicity of the marriage is desirable. This is the purpose of the wedding party which can be as simple as one chooses.

What is recommended for the bridegroom is to arrange a dinner party for relatives, neighbours and friends. Again, this need not be a grand affair. A simple one is preferable. The idea is to allow neighbours and relatives to share in the happy occasion. Apart from this, nothing is required.

•Undressed after ablution

If one happens to undress, does he need to do his ablution again?

No. Being undressed when one is alone does not render ablution invalid. In fact, when we take a bath, we have ablution and we are totally undressed. Why should the case be different otherwise.

•School of thought followed by the Religious Editor, *Arab News*

Is it permissible for a person to follow any four schools of thought at any particular time?

It is important to be certain of one's grounds when one conducts his worship or his affairs. He must be sure of his source of information about what Islam requires of him. When you send a question to *Arab News*, you do not know which schools of thought support the view which you are given. The religious editor takes it upon himself to give you the most suitable answer in your case, after weighing the evidence supporting each particular view scholars have recorded on the same question.

That means that you do not actually follow a particular school of thought all the time.

That applies to all of us. We either know which school of thought approves the view we are following or may not know it. The case of following a single school of thought throughout one's life is very rare.[Added: or at least not practical.]

•Basis of rulings given by the Religious Editor, *Arab News*

I find your answers highly convincing and illuminating, but there is rarely any evidence supporting them from the Qur'an and the Hadith. Please explain.

I will tell you straightaway that anyone who gives religious opinion without relying on Qur'an or Hadith can only come out with unconvincing answers. This is due to the fact that Islamic teachings and rulings can be derived from Allah's revelation in the Qur'an and in the Hadith. I always try my best to support my answers with such evidence. If on occasions you find that lacking, it is only because direct relevance of the Qur'anic verse or the Prophet's statement to the particular question in hand may not be readily apparent. The other reason is that like every human being, I am liable to forget. When I quote the Hadith, I want to be absolutely certain of its text. Otherwise, I would like to assure you that I do not include in *Arab News* anything without being certain of its correctness.

•Past unlawful earnings

A trading company which obtained interest based banking facilities for conducting its business made a good profit which was paid to the shareholders. The general manager, who at the same time was a major partner, bought some land and real estate with what he had received from the company. His investment has multiplied over the years to about six times its original value. However, when he realized that Islam forbids interest, he resigned and left his job. What worries him now is what to do with the assets and real estate he possesses, as they were acquired out of the income of interest-based trade operations.

This is a tricky question, because I take it that it is pretty impossible for the man concerned to know how much of his original earnings came from the facilities the company received from the bank and what percentage of that profit was the result of the direct investment of his money and how much of it was due to his own efforts. You may have a situation where a company could hope to make a net profit of, say, 20,000 riyals a year if its trading is confined to the money the partners have paid in as capital. However, with banking facilities, the company may make a much greater profit, which is not proportionate to the actual interest it pays or receives. Moreover, the company in such conditions does not receive interest, but pays it in return for the facilities which it receives from the bank. These may be in the shape of loans or some other facilities such as letters of credit and so on. The operations of the company may be all very legitimate, but its profits have a doubtful aspect as a result of receiving such banking facilities and paying interest on them.

We certainly cannot condemn all the income this person received from his company as unlawful. Otherwise, we would be saying that all the efforts he and his partners put in the work of the company have no value. You realize that the efforts are more important in the work of the company, and indeed, from the Islamic point of view.

What I would tell this gentleman is that the fact that he has left the company because of the nature of its operations is highly commendable. Within the context of usury, Allah says:

> *"He who receives admonition from his Lord and stops (his usurious activities) may have what he earned in the past, and Allah will make His decision in this case."*

But I will also recommend this person to be very charitable and pay whatever he can to poor and needy people. I hope by so doing,i.e. having nothing more to do with usury and being very charitable, the reward he receives will offset his past mistakes. Certainly, by repenting of his past sins he has taken the first step and by being charitable he takes a positive second step which will undoubtedly bring him forgiveness by Allah.

•Abortion on medical grounds

There are many genetic disorders for which currently no cure is available, but diagnosis is possible. Some of these disorders, when confirmed, may require termination of pregnancy. What is your opinion on this important issue in the light of Islamic teachings: can abortion be allowed on medical grounds?

In 1983, a conference was held in Kuwait in which specialized doctors of medicine and Islamic scholars took part. One of the most important subject discussed was abortion. There was a great deal of discussion on the various aspects of abortion and when it can be considered appropriate.

From the findings of that conference it can be concluded that abortion is permissible if the continuation of pregnancy poses a real threat to the life of the mother. In this case, abortion can be performed at any stage during the pregnancy, and as soon as it is clear that termination of pregnancy is the only way to save the life of the mother.

As for other medical conditions, scholars differed a great deal on this issue. It is however, remarkable that the proceedings show that gynecologists and obstetricians who also have sound Islamic knowledge took a stronger attitude opposing abortion at any stage of the pregnancy. Scholars of fiqh could find room for a more understandable attitude.

They gave different verdicts for different stages of the pregnancy. Most of them say that abortion is forbidden after 120 days of conception. Others say that this prohibition begins after 45 days. Both groups define the limit which they favour on the basis of a certain Hadith. The one which speaks of 120 days may be given in translation as follows:

"Indeed, the creation of each one of you is brought together in the mother's belly for 40 days in the form of a drop of sperm, then he is a germ-cell for a like period, then an embryonic lump for a like period, then there is sent to him the angel who blows the breath of life into him and who is commanded about four matters: to write down his means of livelihood, his life span, his actions and whether happy or unhappy.

By Allah, other than whom there is no God, one of you may behave like the people of paradise until there is but an arm's length between him and it, and that which has been written overtakes him and so he behaves like the people of hell fire and thus he enters it; and one of you behaves like the people of hell fire until there is but an arm's length between him and it, and that which has been written overtakes him and so he behaves like the people of paradise and thus he enters it." (Related by Al Bukhari & Muslim.)

We note that the Prophet speaks of three stages of forty days each before spirit is blown into the embryo. It is on this basis that some scholars consider that abortion on medical grounds is permissible at this stage.

•Usage of abbreviation A.D.

Is it wrong to use the abbreviation A.D., as we Muslims do not believe in the death of Christ while the abbreviation denotes "after death."

I see nothing wrong with the usage of the abbreviation A.D. In the dating of history events, to denote that a certain event took place so many years after Christ. This abbreviation means "of the Christian era." It is taken from the Latin phrase "Anno Domini."

It does not refer to the alleged death or crucifixion of the Prophet Jesus, which we, as Muslims, believe not to have happened. Replacing it with an abbreviation denoting his rise to heaven will create confusion and will not be understood.

•Women's hairstyles

The Prophet is quoted to have condemned the women who, *"although clothed, are yet naked, seducing and being seduced, their hairstyle is like the tilted humps of camels. These will not enter paradise nor will its fragrance even reach them, although its fragrance reaches a very great distance."* Could you please explain why is this particular hairstyle censured by the Prophet?

It is not merely a specific hairstyle that is censured by the Prophet. It is the fact that a woman tries to attract the attention of other people when she goes out or appears in public. This is what is meant by the description by the Prophet of such women as *"clothed are yet naked."*

They certainly wear clothes, but their attire is meant to be attractive, or even seductive. In this way, they help promote indecency in society.

As you are well aware, a Muslim woman should dress in a decent and modest fashion. Her dress should cover all her body with the exception of her face and forearms. When a woman reveals any other part of her body in front of men, she violates Islamic teachings.

•Umrah - a duty

If one performed the Umrah, must he also perform Haj? Is it true that if he does not, the Umrah will not be valid?

I must admit that I find this argument intriguing. Why should the delayed performance of one duty affect another duty which has already been performed?

Both Umrah and pilgrimage are duties applicable to all Muslims. The only condition which makes this requirement optional relates to the ability of the person to perform this duty. When a person meets the condition of ability, he should hasten to perform the pilgrimage and the Umrah as early as possible. If he delays its performance, he never knows whether

he will be able to fulfil his duty the following year or later. With this possibility in view, the Prophet instructs us: "Offer your pilgrimage before you are unable to offer it." I realize that some people argue that it is better to offer the pilgrimage in old age, when one will have all his sins forgiven. This is a false argument. For one thing, a person is never sure that he will be able to offer the pilgrimage when he grows old. For another, the benefit of offering pilgrimage early in one's life is limitless.

Now, Umrah is a duty in the same way pilgrimage is one. Its fulfillment must be done as early as possible. Therefore, when you are able to go to Makkah to do the Umrah, you should do so. Whether this takes place at the same time that you do the pilgrimage or not is immaterial. If you have not done the pilgrimage yet but you are able to go and perform the Umrah, you should not hesitate to do so. There is nothing which will render your Umrah invalid after you have offered it. It is not right that its reward depends on whether or not you offered the pilgrimage.

•Drinking what is leftover by another person

Some scholars are of the opinion that it is sunnah to drink what is left over by another person in his glass. How could this be explained in the light of the fact that certain diseases can be transmitted this way?

It is certainly not a sunnah to drink what someone else has left over in his glass. When we say that it is a sunnah, it means that Islam recommends it. To have such a recommendation, we need to have some sort of instructions by the Prophet. There is none in this particular case.

But we have to understand that in such a situation it is not sufficient that the Prophet had shared the same glass or cup with other people. In order to make sure that we know what he has recommended, he would have followed that with a verbal statement of some sort. The absence of any, means that it is not a sunnah.

It is true that we have some reports which tell us that the Prophet was offered some drink when there were so many people. There was little amount of that drink in the container. The Prophet drank from it and passed it over to the person sitting next to him. He drank his fill and passed it over again. The same was repeated over and over again until everyone drank as much as he wanted. But that was a special case and one of many incidents in the life of the Prophet which Allah facilitated in order to reassure those early Muslims that they were following the true religion taught by the Messenger of Allah who

always spoke the truth. As you say, certain diseases could be transmitted through such a practice, which means, by necessity, that it could not be recommended by Islam.

•Mourning

When a member of the family dies, what sort of mourning is allowed?

Different societies have different customs and traditions associated with death in the family. In non-Islamic societies, there are visible signs of mourning which are supposed to convey grief. People, especially women, should wear black for a certain period, according to the degree of their relation with the deceased. Men may wear a black tie, etc. In certain communities, death is marked by loud crying and tearing of clothes, etc. All this is forbidden in Islam. This does not preclude that people may grieve for their deceased and they may express their grief with shedding tears. This sort of crying must not be accompanied by wailing. That is un-Islamic.

The maximum period of mourning for a woman is three days, if the deceased is a very close relation to her, but not her husband. In other words, mourning for a deceased father, son or brother may be only over a period of three days, after that, she must show her acceptance of Allah's verdict.

We have a report of two cases of the Prophet's wives, Um Habiba and Zainab. The first lost her father, Abu Sufian, and the other lost her brother. After three days, in each case, each of them requested perfume to wear. Both of them said that they had no desire whatsoever to wear perfume, but they had heard the Prophet saying:

> *"It is not lawful for a woman who believes in Allah and the day of judgement to be in mourning for any deceased person for over three nights, except for her husband when the period of mourning is four months and ten days."*

As you realize, this is the length of the waiting period of a widow. During her waiting period, she must not wear make-up.

•Congregational prayer at home or office

I live with a group of my friends in a bachelor accommodation provided by our employers. When we first came, most of us used to miss some of

our prayers. However, we are all praying regularly now. Sometimes we find it difficult to go to the mosque for congregational prayer and we offer prayer in congregation at home or in the office. Some people suggest that our prayer is invalid. Please comment.

It is definitely better if you offer your obligatory prayers with a congregation in a mosque. The Prophet states:

> "*Prayer in congregation is rewarded 27 times more than the prayer of the individual.*"

When the Prophet was asked about the best action a person can do, he answered: "*To offer prayers when they fall due.*" Congregational prayers are offered in the mosque shortly after they are due, then prayer in the mosque with the congregation is far better than any other place.

However, every one of us works within the constraints of his own circumstances. Allah has not made it obligatory that we pray any prayer at any particular moment or in a particular place. He has given us a range of time for each prayer. The Prophet says: "The whole earth has been assigned to me as a place of worship and a source of purification." A Muslim may pray anywhere. When you offer your prayers at home, they are perfectly valid. If it so happens that two of you are at home or in the office and you want to offer your prayer, it is far better if you offer in congregation. What you should guard, however, is against substituting congregational prayer at home [or office] for prayer in the mosque. In that way you cut yourself from the local community. This will not do. Whenever you can attend the congregation at the mosque, you should do so. If you are praying at home, it is far better to pray in congregation than to pray alone.

•Who benefits by a married woman's wages

May I put to you the case of a married couple, both of whom are medical doctors. The husband takes up a job in Saudi Arabia and his wife joins him two years later. When she applies for a job, he makes an effort to help her secure the job. However, after she has started working, he begins to claim all her wages. He says that under Islam a woman is entitled only to money she brings with her from her father's home.

Whatever she earns after marriage belongs to her husband. It is needless for me to say that this has caused a great deal of problems within that family. The woman finds herself paying for all the family expenses, while the husband uses his salary to buy houses and property back home in his own name. She is not even able to send a portion of her salary to her parents. She feels very bad about this. She realizes that her parents have a claim on her wages, because they worked hard to enable her to follow her studies until she graduated. It is time for them to enjoy some comfort as a result of bringing up their daughter to this stage. The husband blocks all that. I will be grateful for your comments on this situation.

As you realize, Allah has guaranteed that the message of Islam will be preserved intact for all time because He wants it to be implemented in human life in all ages and in all communities. Therefore, He has made it adaptable to all situations, so that people cannot argue that the conditions prevailing in their community make it impossible to implement the divine message. This is one of the essential characteristics of Islam which add to its strength.

There is no doubt that social conditions differ from one community to another. We cannot compare a tribal or nomadic community to the social conditions prevailing in an industrialized society. Indeed, the conditions within the same country differ from rural to urban areas. How, then, can one set of teachings be applicable to all communities in all ages? The answer is found in the fact that Islam provides certain guide-lines and allows every community to conduct its life the way it likes, within the framework provided by its general guide-lines and principles. In the overall social set up, Islam defines rights and duties. However, where it is possible for a human being to usurp the rights of others, Islam defies these rights very clearly. Moreover, Islam establishes a perfect balance between rights and responsibilities. It is not acceptable from the Islamic point of view that a certain person enjoys certain rights without having to fulfil certain duties in return. Otherwise, if a person can require another to do certain things by way of duty, without giving that person certain rights, that becomes a case of exploitation which leads to much injustices. It goes without saying that exploitation and injustice undermine the very existence of any community in which they prevail. A relationship which involves injustice is hateful to Allah. He says in a Qudsi Hadith:

"My servants, I have forbidden Myself injustice and I have made injustice forbidden to you. Therefore, do not be unjust to one another."

With regard to family relations, Islam imposes certain duties on both husband and wife in return for certain rights which it assigns to each of them. The balance between the rights and duties of each is a perfect one. In this way, Islam secures a happy life for the family. When both husband and wife fulfil their duties, they will enjoy their rights.

According to Islam, a woman is not required to work in order to earn her living. Her husband is responsible to ensure a decent standard of living for her according to his means. Even when a woman is richer than her husband, her wealth does not deprive her of the right to be supported by him. If he takes advantage of her wealth in order to leave his duty unfilled, without having first secured her consent to this arrangement, then he is accountable for his misdeed. It is open to her to seek divorce on grounds of her not being supported by her husband. An Islamic court will have no hesitation to issue an order nullifying the marriage if the husband will not honour his responsibility.

It may be useful to add here that an unmarried woman also does not need to work for her living. She is entitled to be supported by her parents or her immediate relatives, such as her brothers. However, if a woman decides to work, Islam does not stop her from doing so.

It is important to know what rights and duties become applicable when a woman takes up employment. It is common knowledge that Islam considers a woman equal to man with regard to the rights of ownership and disposal of property as well as conducting her own business transactions and commercial dealings. Therefore, when a woman earns something from her work, her earnings belong totally to her. If she is unmarried, her father cannot claim her earnings as his own. Similarly, a woman's husband cannot put any claim to her earnings.

It may be suggested here that when a married woman goes out to work, she leaves her household duties undone. Therefore, the husband is entitled, or so it is claimed, at least to share of the salary or earnings of his wife. We have to examine this argument a little more carefully.

The duties of a wife toward her husband, according to Islamic law, are well defined. They do not include doing any cleaning, ironing, cooking or any other household work. Marriage is a contractual relationship which allows a man and woman to fulfil their desires in

a legitimate way. If a woman takes an undertaking which prevents her from meeting that responsibility, then her husband has the right to prevent that undertaking.

Someone may ask at this point: Who is then to do the housework? The answer is two fold:

If we are speaking strictly from the points of view of rights and duties, it is not the duty of the woman to do the housework in her husband's home. If he wants the work done, he has to see to it that it is done. Life is not all about rights and duties. There is much more in the marital relationship than duties and rights. There is what Islam terms "companionship based on goodwill." It is under this heading that the duties and responsibilities of the family are divided among the husband and wife. When we ask for guide-lines on this particular point, they are readily available.

At a certain stage, there was some disagreement between Fatima, the Prophet's daughter and her husband, Ali who was the Prophet's cousin. They put their disagreement to him, requesting him to define their responsibilities for them. The Prophet said to his daughter:

> *"You do the work that must be done inside the home, and he does what need to be done outside."*

This division of the family work is both fair and practical.

What we may deduce from all this is that if a woman does not do the work that has to be done inside the family home, she fails on meeting the requirement of the companionship and goodwill. It is open to her husband to divorce her if she persistently refuses to do it. She may argue that it is not her duty, but as we have said, there is much more to family life than strict duties.

When a woman wants to go out to work, her husband may prevent her from doing so, if he feels that her job will seriously affect the family, especially with regard to the upbringing of the children. However, if she was working when they got married, and he has not indicated to her at the time of his proposal that he wants her to quit her job, this is taken as consent on his part to her working. He may not withdraw that consent after marriage. It is not open to him then to ask her to leave her job. If she refuses, she is within her rights.

This is absolutely fair, because the fact that he has not made his intention clear to her about her continued working is regarded as agreement to the situation which obtained before their marriage.

As for the salary she receives from her work, or indeed her earnings, these belong to her. She may determine how she uses her income. If she wants to help her own family with part or all of her income, she is only being dutiful and she will be rewarded by Allah for being so.In this particular case, which we are examining, there is no doubt that the husband is taking advantage of his wife. To claim that what she earns belongs to him, is absolutely unjust. He cannot justify it in any way. If she does not agree to give it to him, he is taking it unlawfully. He may not treat it as his own money. He must obtain her permission before taking it. If she does not give him that permission, he must not touch it.

Some people suggest that since both husband and wife are working, they should share the family expenses. The answer to this suggestion is that this is possible only by mutual agreement. What we have to understand is that the husband has no right to what his wife may earn or own. If she willingly gives him something of it, he is welcome to have it. If he hustles or pressures or cajoles her in order to obtain something from her, he is taking it unjustly and he will be punished by Allah for doing so.The woman in this case is surrendering her rights against her will. She must find some way of making it clear to her husband that what he is taking from her is unlawful to him. If he continues to claim it by right, then she should look at bringing about a drastic change in their relationship.

•Zamzam water

Is it recommended to carry zamzam water to one's home country?

It is recommended to drink of zamzam water after one has done tawaf. Taking it home is not something that has been recommended to us. It was not the practice of the companions of the Prophet to carry zamzam water home with them. However, if one takes it home for people to drink it, he is welcome to do so.

•Gradual prohibition of intoxicants

Was liquor permissible to drink in an early stage of Islamic history? If yes, why was it forbidden later.

Islam did not start by legalizing alcoholic drinks and changed its mind later. It simply approached the matter in the only way that brings the desired results: to establish first the basis upon which instructions are to be followed. Once faith was deeply rooted in the hearts of the Muslims, they only needed a simple instruction and they abided by it.

During the process of establishing the faith, Islam simply left matters to the wisdom of individuals. But once its first task was completed, it sent about finalizing the second stage, giving clear and detailed instructions, outlining what is forbidden and what is permissible.

•Is it permissible to have a dog as a pet?

According to Islam, a dog is impure. If it eats in a plate or it touches something, the plate should be washed seven times, one of them with water mixed with dust. Since it is impure, it cannot be kept as a pet. However, it is permissible to have a guard dog or to use a dog in hunting, when this is absolutely necessary.

•The use of 'Bindi' or 'Bindiya'.
Is it forbidden to keep 'bindi' i.e. adhesive sticker or colored enamel on our foreheads?

The general rule which governs the use of such material is that everything is lawful unless pronounced otherwise. There may be some rules which restrict the use of certain items and these rules may apply to other items by analogy. It is forbidden for a Muslim, for example, to wear clothes or to have an article of equipment which bears a distinctive mark of unbelievers. I am not sure what this bindi looks like, but I can say that it is permissible in the first instance. However, if it is distinctive of women who follow some other religion like Buddhists or Hindus, it becomes forbidden. The prohibition does not come as a result of anything inherent in the article itself, but as a result of its being distinctive of non-Muslim women. [Added: If you are living in a society where there are both Muslim and non-Muslim women living and those non-Muslim women use 'bindi', then it will be forbidden for the Muslim women to wear 'bindi'. However, in a purely Muslim society, where a women is accepted and treated as a Muslim unless established otherwise, there should be no restriction on its use. However, one may still say that it is strongly discouraged.]

On the other hand, if this adhesive sticker or enamel is waterproof, then a Muslim woman who wears it cannot have a proper ablution. It prevents the water from reaching a part of

her face which should be washed. Since her ablution is incomplete, her prayer will be invalid. In this case, the prohibition is a consequence of its effect on prayer.

To sum up, if this enamel or sticker is not distinctive of non-Muslim women, a Muslim woman may wear it provided she removes it when she wants to have ablution for prayer.

•Recitation for a deceased.

If one recites a surah or passage of the Qur'an and finishes with supplication to Allah to forgive a deceased relative, is his action correct or not? Two Islamic magazines published in India have given opposite views on this issue. What is the best way of doing something to benefit a deceased relative?

If you finish your recitation of the Qur'an with supplication, that is perfectly in order. Any act of worship may be accompanied by a prayer or supplication. If you mention a deceased relative in your prayer, requesting Allah to forgive him and to admit him into heaven, then such a prayer is answered. You may do this at any time, even during your obligatory prayers, or after you have finished them, during a day of fasting, or just before you finished your fast or when you worship at night, or indeed at any other time. Obviously, when you have offered an act of worship, whether it is obligatory or voluntary, then your prayer stands a better chance of being answered, because it follows a good action on your part. As for prayer for a deceased person, we do that in the special prayer known as janazah, which follows the death of a person, just before the deceased is buried. We can continue to pray for him or her at any time. Evidence supporting this may be drawn from the hadith in which the Prophet is quoted to have said: "When a human being dies, all his actions come to an end, except in one of three ways: a continuing act of charity, a useful contribution to knowledge and a dutiful child who prays for him."

The disagreement in these two magazines you have mentioned may not be on whether supplication for a deceased person is appropriate or not, but on the particular case of praying Allah to pass on the reward of your recitation of the Qur'an to him.

This is something over which scholars have different views. Therefore, if a person does it, we should not object to his action. Indeed, we hope that Allah may accept his prayer and reward the deceased person.

You can be of benefit to a deceased person by praying for him, giving sadaqah and asking Allah to reward it to him, etc. If he did not do the pilgrimage in his life, you may do it on his behalf. You can pray Allah as often as possible to forgive him and admit him into heaven.

•Must good actions be based on faith?

You have emphasized time and again the great importance of good actions. You have also pointed out that good actions must be based on faith, otherwise they are worthless. As you are well aware, the majority of people in the world are non-Muslims. The overwhelming majority of people follow the religions of their parents. Even the Qur'an refers to this fact. At the same time, all religions teach good moral values and good manners. Should it not be that such teachings, irrespective of their source, be sufficient to ensure salvation in the hereafter?

It is true that Islam puts greater emphasis on the concept common to all divine religions which states that in order to have any value at all in Allah's scales, good actions must be based on faith. If we examine this concept carefully, we find that it ensures two very important qualities. First, it assigns a very high value only to action which are free from any ulterior motives, sincere, and undertaken with the aim of earning reward from Allah. Hypocrisy and personal prestige are thus given no value at all. Some people may be willing to do good actions if such actions ensure good returns for them either materially or morally. But if they feel that their actions will go unnoticed by their community, they will think twice before doing them. In this respect, we find that faith provides the right motive for the good actions any person undertakes. The second advantage is that it provides people with the motivation to do good all the time. When a person is faced with a choice between two actions, he or she will always choose the better one in order to gain a greater reward. Even when the other action may give the person himself a more immediate or personal benefit, he chooses the better one because it serves his ultimate purpose more fully.

A further advantage is that faith makes a man's actions more consistent and coherent. They all have the same ultimate aim and seek the same final purpose. Therefore, they tend to strengthen one another. That is bound to impart a particular color to the personality of man himself. His way of thinking will move in a certain direction. As a result, he is a better person because he always tries to determine what is better for him and for his community and do it.

There is another relationship between faith and action. When the Prophet was asked to define faith, he said: "It is a belief that is deeply entrenched in one's heart and to which credence is given by action." From this definition we learn that it is not sufficient for a person to say that he believes in a particular religion or that he is totally committed to a particular religion or that he is totally committed to a particular faith, unless he follows that statement by actions which confirm his claims. Thus, faith does not come about merely by an intellectual acceptance of a certain creed. It must translate itself into a practical example. Once this relationship is established, actions require an additional value. They have one unifying motivation and have a superior aim.

It is true that the overwhelming majority of people tend to follow the religions of their parents. But Allah wants something extra from us. It is not sufficient for any one of us to say to Allah on the day of judgment that he has lived as a Muslim only because his parents brought him up as one. He is required to make a conscious choice, whether to follow Islam or not. At one point or another in the life of every single one of us, he finds himself facing a clear choice, brought about by his personal circumstances. He or she will not fail to realize that the choice in front of him or her is whether to be a believer or not. Once I was mentioning this to a friend of mine who was brought up by parents who did not care much for religion. He told me: I go further than that. It is not merely the choice that is presented to him, but the great advantage that he is about to have when he follows the proper faith is also made clear. When he makes this choice, he is conscious that if he turns his back on faith, he is making the wrong choice in the long run. He then told me about his life and how he was brought up. He also explained how he faced the choice when the issues presented themselves clearly to him. He said: I cannot praise Allah enough for enabling me to make the right decision.

When we remember that Allah holds us to account individually, we are bound to realize that divine justice requires that individual accountability should be based on individual choice. It is for this reason that Islam considers that a person who goes through his life following the teachings of Islam only because he was brought up as a Muslim fails in his duty to make the choice consciously. Everyone is required to make use of the great gift Allah has given every single one of us, namely, the ability to reason and examine. When we do, we alleviate ourselves to the exalted human standard Allah wants us to achieve. We believe in Him as a result of an intellectual choice.

Whether good actions done by unbelievers are of any great value or not is something with which we should not concern ourselves over much. As human beings, we are not in a position to judge others. We accept the criterion Allah has told us, through His last

Messenger, that applies to us. Actions acquire their value through faith. What He does with His servants on the day of judgement is His own concern. What we know is that He does not deal unjustly with anyone. In the Qur'an we read:

> *"And the record (of every one's deeds) will be laid open; and you will behold the guilty filled with dread at what is in it; and they will exclaim: Woe to us! What a record is this! It leaves out nothing, be it small or great, but takes everything into account. And they will find all that they ever did facing them now, and will know that your Lord does not wrong anyone."* (18:49)

•Is 'Iqamah' before congregation obligatory?

We were about to offer prayers in congregation at the office, when the telephone rang. The imam answered it while iqamah was being said. When he had finished, he asked for the iqamah to be said again. Should he have done that, considering that we were only three persons joining the prayer?

The iqamah, or a shortened call to prayer, is said immediately before an individual or a congregation start their prayer. It serves to put the worshipper in of mind most suitable for his worship. It is recommended or encouraged, i.e. sunnah, not obligatory. If a person does not say it, or if the congregation start without any one of them saying it, that does not detract in any way from the validity of the prayer.

If one has said iqamah and then something took place to delay him from starting his prayer, it is open to him to decide whether he wants to say the iqamah again or not. However, if the distraction is short, then the iqamah need not be said again. Suppose that when the imam answered the telephone, he explained to his caller that he was just about to pray and he would return the call after he had finished, then it would have been more appropriate if he started the prayer without repeating the iqamah. On the other hand, if the caller was his boss and he wanted to ask him about a certain matter and the telephone conversation took a few minutes, then repeating the iqamah is perhaps more preferable.

•Prayers - greeting the mosque.

It is said that when the imam delivers his sermon on Friday, all activity must come to a halt. What about a late comer offering two rak'ahs by way of greeting the mosque?

Scholars take different views on this particular question with one school of thought making a strict rule that once the sermon, or khutbah, has started, then it is not permissible to offer any prayer by any person. What is agreed to by all schools of thought is that once the sermon has started, no one who is already in the mosque may stand up to offer voluntary prayers. As for a late comer, he may offer his two rak'ahs in greeting the mosque immediately after he enters, and before he sits down. Once the Prophet was delivering the sermon when one of his companions entered and was about to sit down. The Prophet instructed him to offer two rak'ahs. As you realize, this prayer, i.e. greeting the mosque is voluntary. Therefore, if a person does not do it, he commits no sin. If he does it, he is rewarded.

•Is *aqeeqah* necessary for all Muslims?. If so, does it have a time limit?

The *aqeeqah* is a sunnah. When a child is born to a family, the father is strongly recommended by the Prophet to slaughter one or two sheep and to invite relatives and neighbors to a meal, in order to allow the community to share in the happy event. The *aqeeqah* is recommended to be carried out shortly after the birth of a baby, preferably on the seventh day of his birth. It may be delayed for a week or two or perhaps a little longer. However, when it is delayed for a long time, the very purpose of it is lost.

•Powers of the devil.

Could you please give your view on the mysteries like "the Bermuda Triangle" where ships and aeroplanes are said to have disappeared without a trace. Who is responsible for such actions? They cannot be of Allah's doing, but could they be the work of the devil or space creatures?

I do not know much about the Bermuda Triangle. Nor should a Muslim be over-concerned with its history. What we should know is that events that take place in the universe are subject to the law of cause and effect. If a ship is lost in the sea, there must be a reason for

its sinking. It cannot just disappear and leave no trace. If it is true that ships are being lost in a certain area, then a study of the sea currents in that area could reveal the cause.

It is not right to attribute such happenings to "the devil". Allah has not given the devil such powers. What the devil does is to persuade people to follow a pattern of behavior which takes them away from the fold of the faithful. When they listen to him, they bring on themselves misery in this life and in the life to come. But the devil cannot interfere with the laws of nature which Allah has sent into operation. Otherwise, the devil would appear to be a force competing with the power of Allah. That is not possible.

Nor can we explain such happenings as the work of space creatures. We have not seen any such creature approach our planet. Apart from science fiction, there is no evidence whatsoever that invaders from other planets or stars represent a danger to human life on earth. While we do not deny the possibility of existence of creatures or civilizations in other planets or galaxies, we better not attribute anything that takes place on earth to them until the time comes, if at all, when we have hard evidence of the existence and their interference with our planet.

•Bowing when we greet.
What is the Islamic view of bowing when we greet someone?

Any action which is similar to an act of worship is forbidden in Islam when it is offered to anyone other than Allah. To bow one's head or to do any similar gesture when one meets another person is to do something akin to an act of worship. Therefore, it is unacceptable from the Islamic point of view. As you realize, bowing is part of our prayer. Even when you do not bow fully as you do in prayer, to lower your head in order to greet someone falls in the same category as doing something which is similar to worship, but you are offering it to a human being. That cannot be sanctioned by Islam.

•Short or long prayers.
Some people offer their prayers short, reciting only a short surah or a small number of Qur'anic verses, so that they can offer more raka'ahs in voluntary prayers. Others prefer to read longer passages of the Qur'an and they offer less in voluntary prayers, but perhaps spend the same time or even longer. Which method is preferable? Similarly, a person like

myself whose mother tongue is not Arabic can say the glorification of Allah less times than an Arab doing one's prostration. Does a person who says more glorification earn more reward, although we may be in the same congregational prayer?

Scholars have expressed two different views with regard to the best situation a human being may be in: prostration during prayer, or standing up and reciting the Qur'an in prayer. In prostration, one expresses with the clearest possible gesture one's submission to Allah and recognition of His greatness. At the same time, he is glorifying Him as his Lord, the Most Supreme. On the other hand, when you stand up on prayer, reciting the Qur'an, you are in worship, reciting Allah's own words. When we try to compare both situations, the comparison is difficult to evaluate. Whichever one you choose is equally valid. My own personal preference is for a longer recitation of the Qur'an in the standing up position.

Perhaps one should not dwell over much on these details. If you are engaged in worship, then Allah will reward you according to your concentration and the time you spend in prayer. There is little to choose between a person who spends half an hour offering voluntary prayers, and doing only two rak'ahs and another who does ten rak'ahs over the same period. When the choice is obvious in Ramadan when people offer taraweeh prayer, with some of them offering 8 rak'ahs over a period of , say, 30 minutes, while others offer 20 raka'ahs over a period of 20 minutes. The latter can hardly concentrate on their prayer, as they make it so short. They have hardly any time to glorify Allah during their prostration when they rise up again. This is a hasty prayer which runs against the recommendations of the Prophet.

When you glorify Allah 3 or 4 times, because of the difficulty in pronunciation you may have as a non-Arabic speaking person, you are rewarded for your effort, and your reward may not be at all less than a person who says such a glorification 10 times over the same period. Allah knows the intention of everyone and He judges actions by intentions. This is clearly stated by the Prophet who says; "Actions are but by intentions. Every man shall have but that which he has intended."

•Prayers ahead of time

As I am traveling to India, I believe that I will not be able to offer prayers during the journey. Please explain whether I can offer prayers before

take off. If, for instance, my flight is at 2 p.m., can I offer Asr and Maghrib prayers at the same time as Dhuhr? Do I shorten these prayers as well?

Shortening prayers is a concession given to travellers after they have started their journey. In other words, if you live in Riyadh and you are traveling from it, you can start shortening your prayers once you are out of the city. If you are traveling by plane, it is when the plane has taken off that you can start reducing your prayers. If is only Dhuhr, Asr and Isha that can be shortened from 4 to 2 rak'ahs. Maghrib and Fajr remain as they are.

When traveling, we are allowed to combine prayers, but the combination applies only to joining Asr with Dhur, or joining Maghrib with Isha. Fajr cannot be joined to any other prayer. It is permissible to join each two of these prayers at any point in their time range. So, you can bring Asr forward to the time of Dhuhr or leave Dhuhr to the time of Asr. The same applies to Maghrib and Isha. That gives us a long time gap which is sufficient for any journey. However, if you are traveling by plane and you have taken off, say, just before Dhuhr time, and your first stop will be after Maghrib has fallen due at your destination, then you offer your prayers on the plane, in your seat. You do the bowing and prostration with your head and body as far as you can. Obviously it is not possible to block the passage in between the seats for your prayers. As I say, when you pray on the plane you reduce your prayers to 2 rak'ahs each, except for Maghrib which remains at three rak'ahs.

•Schools of thought - Why stick to only one?
Every Muslim should follow the Prophet (peace be on him), but is it also necessary that every Muslim should follow one of the four schools of thought? If the answer is in the affirmative, how do we account for this considering that these schools of thought were established much later than the Prophet?

The short answer to this question is that it is not necessary to follow any one of the four major schools of thought. Nor is it done in practice except by a few people.

If a person has enough knowledge of Islam and how rulings are deduced from texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith, he normally looks at every question separately, choosing the ruling which he feels to be weightier regardless of which school of thought subscribes to it. On the other hand, if he has only scanty knowledge of fiqh, or Islamic jurisprudence, then he follows whatever ruling is given by a scholar in any particular matter. Take for

example the readers of *Arab News* who write to me. They take my advice without questioning me regarding the school of thought which advocates that particular opinion. It is true that some of them mention that they belong to a particular school of thought and request an opinion on its basis. I try to accommodate them as far as possible, but sometimes I prefer to give them the opinion which is most suitable, or easiest to follow in their particular circumstances. Sometimes I give an advice on a serious question which is contrary to what all four schools of thought say. For example, in the case of pronouncing divorce three times in one session. I lean towards the opinion of Imam Ibn Taimiyah, who is no less an imam than the founders of the four schools of thought. He states that such a divorce counts as a single, revocable divorce. You will appreciate the amount of misery that is avoided by following this ruling which is supported by strong evidence from Hadith and by a growing number of scholars and which has been incorporated in the family law of a number of Muslim Countries.

Only when a scholar has studied a particular school of thought thoroughly and when he subscribes to its methodology that we find a person strictly following that school of thought. He is of course entitled to his decision.

What we must not forget is that the schools of thought are simply methods of deduction of various rulings concerning the affairs of human life. They are all based on the teachings of the Prophet and the practices of his companions and the opinions learned from scholars in the early period of Islam.

•Who should lead the prayer?

What are the criteria to choose someone to lead a congregational prayer? If you enter a mosque and find that in the absence of the regular imam, someone is leading the prayer whom you know to be unsuitable, should you join them or not?

If a group of people is offering prayer together, they should choose someone from among them to lead the prayer. The one to be chosen is the one who recites the Qur'an best or the one who has learned more of the Qur'an by heart. If two people are of the same ability in this respect, then the elder of the two is to be chosen. No one may lead 'another in his own home' or place of authority without the latter's permission.

What this means is that if two or three people are offering prayer in the home of any one of them, then the house owner or occupier should lead the prayer, unless he permits one of them to lead. Moreover, it is the congregation who chooses the imam, not the imam who imposes himself on them.

From another point of view, it is permissible that a young boy leads a group of adults in prayer, and a blind man leads a group of people all of whom enjoy a good eyesight. There is nothing wrong if either the imam or the one being led by him offers his prayer seated for a good reason, nor with either of them having had dry ablution while the other having had normal ablution. Either the imam or the one following him may be a traveller or offering voluntary prayers while the other is resident or offering obligatory prayer. Again, the imam may be a person who has a lesser standing in society than the people being led by him. All such situations are acceptable.

If you come to the mosque and you find that the congregation is being led by someone whose conduct leaves something to be desired, you should join the prayer because it remains valid. It is much better that you show that you are one of the group than to pray alone. Moreover, if you had offered your obligatory prayer and went into a mosque or joined some people in a certain place and you found the people were about to offer the same obligatory prayer you have offered, you should join them. You must not appear to be isolating yourself from a congregation. Such a situation is liable to raise questions about your decision.

•What dower to pay?

Could you please let me know what is the actual amount of dower, or meher, prescribed by Islam.

This question has been coming up time after time. What I find strange about it is the request for an exact figure. Islam does not prescribe a particular amount which must be paid as a dower, or meher, to be given by the prospective husband to his prospective wife at the time when their marriage contract is made. In establishing the right of the wife to have complete say in what she may do with her dower, Allah mentions in the Qur'an

" *And if you give any of them (i.e. your women) a large amount, you may not take anything out of it. Would you take it when it is an absolute injustice and a clear sin?* " Only if the wife willingly and with clear mind and free choice forgo part of her dower to her husband, he may take it.

The above quoted verse, which is No.20 in Surah 4, makes it clear that the dower may be a very large amount In this connection, it is useful to quote the famous report that Umar, the second caliph, wanted dowers to be moderate, he advised people while he was addressing them, before a Friday prayer not to let dowers exceed what the Prophet paid to his wives. A woman in the mosque objected to him and quoted this verse. The caliph acknowledged that the woman was right and he was wrong. [Added: This follows, therefore, that it is proper for women to attend prayers in mosques.]

Having said that, I should perhaps remind you of the Hadith which states that the best women are the fairest looking and cheapest in dower. This Hadith is taken as an encouragement to make dowers small so that they do not represent an impediment to marriage. It is often the case that young men have to delay marriage in order to raise funds to meet the expenses of establishing a new home. When dowers are cheap, the task is made that much easier. If they are expensive, marriage maybe delayed. This is bound to lead to results which Islam does not welcome. In short, a dower may be as little as one rial, or even less, provided the bride willingly accepts that. On the other hand, it may be any amount the two parties agree between them. The dower must be of benefit to the woman and this benefit may be a moral, rather than material one. One of the companions of the Prophet was married in return for teaching his wife the surahs of the Qur'an he had learned. This is an educational benefit which is certainly valuable. No money was paid. That represented the dower, and the Prophet approved that.

•Arranged marriages and personal choices.

Are only arranged marriages permissible in Islam? What does Islam say about prospective couples falling in love before they agree to marry? This is indeed what happens in most cases in my country.

When we speak of what sort of marriage is permitted in Islam, we are actually speaking of a process in which two persons are united in wedlock. This process, which represents the actual marriage does not look at what has happened between the man and the woman before they come forward with their request to get married. An agreement must exist between them, otherwise no one can force them to get married. The marriage itself requires a commitment by the bride, or her guardian who acts for her, and an acceptance by the bridegroom. This is how we described the actual marriage contract. The woman's guardian says to the bridegroom : I am marrying you my daughter (or other woman) whose name is so and so for such and such a dower, etc." That represents the commitment. The

bridegroom must accept verbally by saying : "I agree to marry your daughter, etc." This technical part has nothing to do with the relationship that may have existed between the two parties. If by"arranged" marriage you mean that the marriage happens after discussions between the two families, in which prospective partners are fully involved, then this is the sort of marriage Islam encourages. It gives marriage its serious character which enhances its chances of success.

A marriage which comes about after a love relationship may not be as glamorous or romantic as it sounds. There are two issues involved here. The first is the relationship which exists between a man and a woman before the marriage takes place. This differs according to traditions and customs prevailing in a particular society. In Eastern societies, the love relationship most probably remains confined to an idealistic and romantic exchange of expressions of love. The girl is keenly aware that she must maintain her chastity and her lover will, in most cases, consider himself responsible to preserve the honor of the girl he loves. Nevertheless, they will try to meet, often in secret, and steal a moment of ecstasy when they express their longing for the moment when they can be united in marriage. While their feelings toward each other may not be reprehensible, if they are not involved in anything sinful, what they actually do may not be allowed in Islam. It is not permissible for a man and a woman to be alone in a closed room if they are not related. When two lovers meet, there is a burning passion within them which may lead them to commit a sin. Hence, it is not the feeling which may be the subject of disapproval, but what may come about as a result of such a feeling can be subject to strong censure. In Western societies, everything is allowed between a man and a woman within marriage and before it. That is certainly unacceptable from the Islamic point of view. Islam has a highly serious moral outlook and it takes every precaution to preserve it.

The other point which is involved is what may be loosely termed a love marriage and its chances of success. It is a fact of life that when two people are in love, they tend to overlook each other's faults. Every one of them thinks the other to be perfect. When they are married and they have to face life together, they begin to see each other's faults. Everyone of us has his weaknesses and points of strength. When we approach marriage in a careful, objective manner, we are more likely to be aware of what we are bargaining for. When our approach is that of love which blinds us to the faults of the beloved, we stand a greater chance of regretting what we are doing. In many Western societies, where love is the primary factor which unites people in marriage, more than one third of marriages end up with divorce. A high percentage of marriages do not last more than two years. In Islamic societies, where the Islamic approach to the marriage is largely followed, the

percentage of discontinued marriages is much lower. That testifies to the wisdom of the Islamic approach.

•Concentration in prayer

Although I attend to my prayers regularly, I am seldom able to concentrate properly. Often I have doubts about the activities and movements included in the prayer. What I would like to know is whether my prayer is valid.

Every one who starts prayers should concentrate fully on the task in hand. He should always think of what he is reading or reciting or doing. If he reflects on the meaning of what he says, he is bound to find it easier to concentrate on his prayers. If you have learned certain surahs of the Qur'an without understanding them, you better try to learn the meaning of each verse so that you can help your concentration by thinking of the meaning. However, if one nevertheless is distracted or suffers a lapse of concentration which results in a confusion in his amount about what stage he has reached in his prayers, there is an easy solution to this problem. If, for example, you doubt whether you have completed two or three rak'ahs, then you are certain that you have done two rak'ahs but you are doubtful about the third one. Therefore, you continue your prayer on the basis of that which you are certain, i.e. two rak'ahs, and then just before you finish you finish your prayer after you have completed your tashahhud you prostrate twice in compensation for forgetfulness. You then finish your prayer normally. If you nevertheless omit to do these two prostrations, your prayer is still valid.

Distraction in prayer happens often, especially when one is preoccupied with immediate problems of his daily life. The Prophet was once leading his companions in a congregational prayer when he finished it after completing two rak'ahs instead of four. One of his companions questioned him about this and when he realized what has happened, he ordered his companions to complete their prayers. No one had to start his prayers afresh. That shows that despite the distraction, the prayer is valid.

•White gold

Is it forbidden for a Muslim man to carry anything made of gold or of silk? The other day I was told that silver too is forbidden, but the so-called "white gold" is allowed. I tried to refute both points without success. It

seems that some people do not realize that "white gold" is just as much gold as the "yellow" variety. The hard metal in yellow gold is copper, while in white gold it can be nickel or palladium or platinum. In other words, white gold can be considerably more expensive than yellow gold of the same carat. Please comment.

I agree with you entirely about white and yellow gold. They are both the same with regard to what is permissible and what is forbidden. It is not he color which matters, but the substance. Since it is gold, then it is forbidden for men to wear. But wearing is the key point. As far as jewelry is concerned, a man is forbidden to wear what is made of gold or any jewelry in which gold constitutes a considerable portion. As for silk, wearing garments made of silk is forbidden, but it is not forbidden to carry either article or to buy it, since they are permissible for women. If you are going home on vacation and you want to buy an article of jewelry for your wife or you mother or sister, then it is perfectly legitimate to do so and to carry it home with you.

As for jewelry for men, it is permissible for a Muslim man to wear a silver ring or to have his sword, or gun or helmet or belt of similar articles adorned with silver. But other articles are not permissible to adorn, even with silver. As for gold, nothing is permissible unless required by necessity, such as tooth fillings.

Perhaps the person who told you that silver articles are also forbidden for men has confused jewelry with other articles. It may be useful to point out here that it is forbidden for men and women alike to eat or drink in plates or glasses or cups made of gold or silver.

The Prophet says: "Do not drink in utensils made of gold or silver and do not eat in plates made of either. Such articles are for them in this life and for you in the life to come" (related by Al-Bukhari). What the Prophet means is that such articles may be used by non-believers in this life, but in the life to come it is only the believers who will enjoy using them, as the non-believers will be suffering in hell. The Prophet is also quoted as saying: "A person who drinks in a cup made of silver drags the fire of hell into his tummy" (Related by Al-Bukhari). It is also forbidden to have cups, plates or other utensils made of silver or gold or to order them to be made. Again this is applicable to both men and women. The reason for this prohibition is that it is evidence of squandering one's money and showing off.

•Ladies' long hair (or short)

Is it true that only married women may wear their hair short, if they so choose? Young girls, it is said, do not have this option. Their parents may not allow them to cut their hair.

The whole notion of having one rule for married women with regard to how long they should wear their hair and another for unmarried women is absurd. Why should it be so? It is only traditional values in a particularly society which make long hair more desirable for women. In another society, the reverse may be true. But this is not how things are determined in Islam. Islam sets rules to be implemented everywhere.

There is nothing to stop a woman from wearing her hair short, if she so desires. The same applies to young girls. The only thing that we must be careful about is that when women cut their hair, they should not appear before 'men' strangers. Indeed, this applies to all women regardless of how long they wear their hair.

•'Walimah' - the purpose of

It is customary in our country to hold a dinner the day following a wedding. However, people believe that this dinner party, to which all relatives and family friends are invited, is treated as permissible, or halal, if the marriage has been consummated, while it is forbidden, or haram, if it has not. Please comment.

The dinner following a wedding is called "walimah". It is strongly recommended and indeed some scholars go as far as making it a duty, because the Prophet said to Abdur Rahman ibn Awf, one of his companions, when he told him that he has got married, to organize it and invite people. A person who is invited to a walimah should answer it, unless there is a cause which justifies his absence, such as his knowledge that some sins are being committed at the place where the walimah is held. Even if a person is fasting, he should go, but he may excuse himself from eating by explaining to his host that he is fasting. If it is voluntary fasting, he may discontinue his fast.

You are no doubt aware that publicity is an essential part of marriage. Indeed, an essential distinction between what is legitimate and what is illegitimate in relations between a man and a woman is publicity. The more a marriage is publicized, the better. The minimum

publicity required by Islam is for two witnesses to be present at the time when a marriage contract is made. But when the wedding takes place, whether it is made a small family affair or a grand one, a walimah is recommended to add to its publicity. Another purpose for the walimah is to ensure that the local community shares in the happy occasion of the marriage of one of its members. What is important to publicize is the fact of the marriage and not its actual consummation. Therefore, the notion that walimah is only lawful if the marriage has been consummated is absurd. No one other than the bride and bridegroom should concern themselves with the actual consummation of the marriage. Local traditions in different communities may have some other requirements, but these are not recommended by Islam.

•Airlines, women's charms

It is well known that Islam requires women to dress modestly when they appear in public. How do you view the advertisements inserted by certain national airlines of Muslim countries in these terms: "A superb in-flight service is assured by our charming air hostesses"?

Such advertisements cannot be accepted by Islam. It is sad that national carriers of Muslim countries feel obliged, in order to compete with other airlines, to try to highlight such aspects of their service. Indeed, they do not need to go to these lengths. When a particular airline provides good service, that service will speak for itself, without the need to stress that at the delivery point of the service there is a "charming" hostess. The overwhelming majority of passengers are interested in the service itself, not in the person who gives it. Such advertisements are an example of how much we have borrowed from Western civilization, without scrutinizing what we are getting in the process.

[Added: Why not look at the advertisements of other foreign airlines who emphasize on the technical supremacy in providing on time schedules and avoiding delays and hazards. That should be something to follow.]

•Observing death anniversaries.

Is it proper to commemorate death anniversaries of one's forefathers by conducting feasts or giving charity and reciting parts of the Qur'an with

the help of other people, including professional reciters of the Qur'an, as it is customary in certain parts of the Muslim world?

Let us ask ourselves why should we commemorate the death of any person? Is it to remember them and renew our sorrow for their departure? Or is it to organize some sort of occasion which we assume to generate some reward from Allah and hope that this reward will go to the deceased person? If it is for the first purpose, then such commemorations are unnecessary. If the deceased person is dear enough to us, we will always remember him or her. Every time we do, we can pray for the deceased and supplicate to Allah to forgive him or her. If it is for the second purpose, then we have to examine it in the light of Islamic teachings.

The Prophet states very clearly that when a human being dies, "*all his actions come to an absolute end, except in one of three ways: a continuous act of charity, a useful contribution to knowledge or a dutiful child who prays Allah for him.*" The first two are matters that the deceased would have done during his life. A person may decide to make a continuing act of charity, such as by allocating certain capital and ensuring that the proceeds of that investment or capital goes to charity. If, for example, a person decides that certain orchards that he owns should go to charity, he should make it clear that the orchard itself should not be sold. It is kept but the fruits that are produced are either given to the poor directly or sold and the price is given to the poor. Every time this is done, his reward from Allah increases.

The third of these possibilities is prayer by a dutiful child. Now this should not be confined to annual anniversaries of death, but a dutiful child will continue to pray for his deceased parents every day of his life.

If he recites the Qur'an, or passages from it, and prays Allah to give the reward of his recitation to his deceased parents, then it is hoped that this is acceptable to Allah. But it is only in such ways that a human being can do something good to a deceased person. Hiring professional reciter of the Qur'an is certainly not one of them. It is a practice that cannot be sanctioned by Islam.

•Friendship with unbelievers

Could you please explain the Qur'anic verse which instructs Muslims in these words : "Take not unbelievers as your friends, and if you do so you

are among them." In our present world, most Muslims have some sort of dealings with non-Muslims, and that approaches friendship in the majority of cases, especially in countries where the Muslims are in minority. What is their position in the light of this Qur'anic injunction?

There is some confusion in the understanding of the Qur'anic verse, which has come about from the translation of the term *'waliy'* which is rendered in the translation you have quoted as "friend". In fact the term "friend" is inadequate as a translation of the Arabic term. The term "friend" occurs in the Qur'an in verse 61 of Surah 24, entitled, Light. Had Allah meant that we must not take unbelievers as friends, in the strict meaning of friendship, He would have used this particular term, *sadeeq,* but He has chosen to use a different term which has much wider connotations.

Translators of the Qur'an have found difficulty in rendering the meaning of the term *waliy* as it occurs in the verse you have quoted and similar verses. It should be noted that in Islamic terminology, the same word is used for the person who acts for a woman in her marriage, giving the commitment to marry her away to her prospective husband. When the suitor accepts that commitment, the marriage is made. Such a person is normally her father, if he is alive and sane. If not, then her grandfather, brother, uncle, or even her adult son may act for her. In such a situation, we normally translate the term *waliy* as "guardian".

As for the situation of dealing with unbelievers, translators of the Qur'an have tried to come to grips with this term by using in their translations words such as "allies, protectors, helpers, bosom friends, etc." One translator uses both "friends and allies" to denote the meaning. Without wishing to comment on these translations, I can say that perhaps the word "ally" is closer to the meaning of the Arabic term. What Allah forbids in our relations with non-believers is the forging of alliances which have far reaching commitments that may take precedence over the implementation of certain provisions of our law.

With the difference in meaning explained, there is no question that friendship on social basis with unbelievers is acceptable, provided that these individuals are not actively hostile to Islam or to Muslims. A clear reference to this in the Qur'an is found in verses 8 and 9 of surah 670, entitled *The Examined One.* These can be rendered in translation as follows : "As for such (of the unbelievers) as do not fight against you on account of your faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, Allah does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity. Indeed, Allah loves those who act equitably. Allah only forbids you to choose for your allies those that fight against you because of your faith, and drive you forth from your homelands, or aid others in

driving you forth. Those of you who choose such people for their allies are truly wrongdoers." Perhaps it is important to explain that the phrase "Allah does not forbid you" which occurs in the first of these two verses does not merely mean an absence of prohibition. It implies in this context, as commentators on the Qur'an explain, a positive encouragement to act towards them with kindness and equity. There are numerous Hadiths which encourage Muslims to be kind to other religious communities, especially those who constitute minorities in the Muslim state. The strong emphasis placed on the need to behave towards them in this way has been heeded by Muslims throughout the ages. Minorities in the Muslim state have always enjoyed a fair and kind treatment by the Muslim majority.

On the personal level, there is nothing to stop any Muslim from forging a friendship with non-Muslims who harbor no ill intentions against Islam or its followers.

•Prophet's birthday celebrations

My uncle has a large number of followers. Every month, he performs a celebration of the Prophet's birthday when he feeds the poor with money he collects from his followers. He recently asked me to make a hut for him in the graveyard where he lives alone. He also asked me to erect a wall around the grave of my deceased father. Please comment.

There is no doubt that Prophet Muhammad conveyed to us Allah's final message and the code of living He wants us to implement in our lives. Every Muslim, therefore, loves the Prophet more than he loves his parents or himself. Without the Prophet's teachings, humanity would have lived in darkness. Our love of the Prophet and the position of honor given to him must conform to what he has taught. Suppose that you have two children and one of them is obedient and dutiful and the other is not that dutiful. When you are asked who of your children loves you best, you are bound to answer that the one who is dutiful loves you much more than his brother. You consider the dutifulness of the first son the mark of his love to you. This is indeed the truth. If your other son professes everyday that he loves you very much and he kisses your hand when he goes out or when you come home, but nevertheless does not abide by your wishes or do your bidding, you do not take his protestations of love very seriously. Therefore, our love of the Prophet must be measured by the same yardstick. If we follow the Prophet's guidance and abide by his teachings and implement what he wants us to implement, then we love the Prophet. If we

are satisfied by professing that we love him and we try to give the proof of that by holding parties to celebrate his birth, then our claims are devoid of any substance.

As for celebrating the Prophet's birthday, whether done every year or every month or every week, that can only be judged according to the Prophet's guidance. We have nothing in what the Prophet has said or done to indicate that he has celebrated his own birthday. None of his companions or the generation which succeeded him held any such celebrations at any time or in any form. Therefore, we can only say that this celebration is an innovation which earns no reward.

I am afraid that your uncle's desire to live in the graveyard is very strange. The place of a learned Muslim is within his community to whom he tries to explain the Islamic teachings and whom he encourages to follow the Prophet's example. To erect a wall around a grave or indeed to do anything with a grave which is a mark of distinction is strongly discouraged. A grave must be simple and raised only about a foot over the ground and should not have a pyramid like shape. Its top should be flat. Tombs are not allowed in Islam.

•Qur'anic recitation - wages for -

For generations, my clan has held the position of mullah in our community. This title signifies "religious leaders." Our function is to lead prayers in mosques, and religious functions and advise people on religious matters, etc. We do not receive any payment in cash or kind for these services. Sometime, however, we are invited by others to read the Qur'an for them, and when it is finished, the host gives his guests a grand feast. He also offers them whatever [Added: some remuneration of cash or kind]. Please explain whether it is permissible to receive remuneration for the recitation of Qur'an?

To read the Qur'an is an act of worship, for which one is rewarded. We have learned that we are credited with good deed for every letter of every word of the Qur'an we utter. On the other hand, to invite people to a meal and to be hospitable to them is an act of kindness which strengthens social ties. Therefore, it is encouraged by Islam and the host receives a reward for his hospitality. So, both actions are proper and acceptable. However, when you combine them and make the latter i.e. the feast, attendant on the

former which is the recitation of the Qur'an, you are making a ritual which needs to be considered according to the teachings of the Prophet and the practice of his companions.

What happens on such an occasion is for everyone of the guests to read a part of the Qur'an, probably one thirtieth. Combined together, their recitation is considered to complete the Qur'an. Since no person can read the Qur'an complete in an hour or two, his guests are considering to be doing him the privilege of completing over a very short time. Hence, he is exceptionally hospitable to them. What should be said about this practice is that the reading of the Qur'an in this fashion has little to do with the purpose for which the Qur'an has been revealed. Allah has sent down the Qur'an as a guide for mankind to take them out of darkness into light. To achieve that purpose, they have to study and understand it and to implement it in their lives. When we recite the Qur'an, our purpose is to understand and implement it. When you hold a function like that which you have described, you set in motion a mechanical operation of a quick reading with little understanding and even less implementation. Had the Prophet wanted us to do this sort of activity, he would have told his companions and they would have practised it. As it is, nothing of this sort is recorded in the authentic books of sunnah. Therefore, we can dismiss it as an innovation.

Moreover, it is far from right to receive remuneration for reading the Qur'an. You do not charge money for worship. Whether you take money from your host or accept his hospitality only, the fact that he is giving this grand reception for the benefit of having the Qur'an read in his home makes the whole thing rather unacceptable. The host would have received much more reward if he invited a number of poor people to his home and gave them a good meal. Similarly, he would receive much greater reward if he recites a part of the Qur'an each day and finishes it within a month or a week. [Added: or whatever period].

•PLS Accounts in Pakistan

I have not made any judgement on that [the banking] system as such. I have answered readers' letters which spoke about certain accounts and transactions. Let me say clearly that I do not have sufficient information about the banking system in Pakistan to make a judgment. What I know is that the government has declared that it is bringing that system into line with Islamic teachings. How far has it gone with its declared objective, I am not in a position to judge. When a reader tells me that he has deposited some savings into a profit and loss sharing account, I give him my opinion that it is permissible to accept any

returns on these deposits. What this means is that we accept at face value what an institution like a bank in Pakistan tells us. If that institution tells us that we will have a share of profits and we will bear a share of any loss, then the transaction is permissible. If, however, it transpires that the claims of the bank or the financial institutions are merely made to attract deposits, while the system itself remains the same as the Western type of banking, then that claim should be rejected. Our attitude should be based on two elements which we apply concurrently; trust and reasonable inquiry. We accept on trust the statements by a bank but we should also undertake a reasonable degree of inquiry to determine whether the claims of the bank are correct or not. We do not reject such claims out of hand, nor do we accept them blindly.

•A husband's long absence from home.

I have been working in Saudi Arabia for the last five years. According to the terms of my contract, I am entitled to a one month vacation and a ticket every two years. My company stipulates that I cannot bring in my family. Therefore my wife stays home. I have been told that according to Islamic rules, one must not be absent from one's wife for more than six months, otherwise, divorce takes place. I am further told that to stay away from one's wife for more than six months is forbidden. Please comment.

According to Islam, marriage establishes certain rights to and imposes duties on both man and wife. One of the rights of a wife is marital companionship. A woman needs to be looked after by her husband for the personal, physical and social, points of view. She is also entitled to sexual fulfillment. When her husband is away from home for a long period, her sense of lack of fulfillment may weigh down heavily on her.

Once Umar Ibn Al Khattab, the second caliph, was walking through the streets of Madinah to find out how the people fared, as was his habit, when he overheard a woman chanting lines of poetry which described her sense of loss as a result of her husband's absence. He went to his daughter, Hafsah, one of the Prophet's wives, and asked her how long a woman could tolerate the absence of her husband. She told him that four months were the maximum period. Since many Muslims needed to be absent from home, because they were fighting with Muslim armies against Byzantine and Persian empires, Umer sent

(directive) to all his commanders that every soldier, is entitled to have a home leave every four months.

On the basis of this event, scholars agree that a man may be absent from home, in connection with his work or with some other purpose, for a maximum period of four months, unless his wife freely agrees to a longer period. Many workers and employees are in the same situation as you are. They choose to travel because they get better jobs and they are able to support their families better. If any of them makes the decision to work abroad in consultation with his wife and she willingly accepts that he may stay away for long periods, then there is nothing wrong with that. If she does not agree to his prolonged absence, he may not exceed four months. However, if he does, his marriage is not dissolved automatically, as was suggested by your friends. His wife may apply to an Islamic court to grant her divorce, and the court may rule in her favour. He does not commit a sin by being absent for a long period, but he is in breach of his duties towards his wife.

•Fatiha - traditions after death

On third, seventh, [tenth] fifteenth or fortieth days of the death of a person, some sort of gathering is held and passages of the Qur'an are recited and meals served. When you explain to the people that such gatherings are not part of the teachings of Islam, they ask why should it be against Islam when only the Qur'an is being recited there.

There is nothing special that happens to the deceased or his relatives on these days. If you examine the origins of such practices, you will find that they date to pre-Islamic days, especially that of the fortieth day. Moreover, they have been borrowed from the traditions of people whose view of death is totally different from that of Islam. While most philosophies consider death to be the end of human life, Islam considers death a prelude to a different type of life. Hence, if the deceased was a good believer, his death is not something that we should be sorry for. In Islam, the proper practice is to offer condolences to the relatives of the deceased and to pray for the deceased's forgiveness. Why a practice which relies on the reading of the Qur'an be against Islam is very simple. Islam is a religion that has been revealed by Allah. The Prophet conveyed it to us complete. Nothing can be added to what the Prophet has taught us, especially in matters of worship. Therefore, when we introduce something into Islamic practices, especially one that relates to worship, we are putting ourselves in a position to complement what the Prophet has done. This is totally unacceptable.

•Hoarding and storage for off-season sale
When a certain commodity is in season, it is available in large quantities and at cheap prices. Later, when the supply decreases, the price increases. This is normally a gradual process. Some businessmen buy large quantities of crops and commodities when they are in high season and store them in order to sell them when the commodities are in short supply. In this way, they make better profits. Is this acceptable or does it come under hoarding?

We have to differentiate between monopoly and a good sense of business. It is a wise businessman who buys his supply of goods in season when the prices are down. If he stores them for a period of time and manages to keep them in good condition, he is able to make good profit when he releases his stock when the commodity is out of season. In this way, he makes a good use of the relationship between supply and demand. If such a businessman plays fair, there is nothing wrong with his practice. The profits he makes are legitimate.

But I must emphasize the aspect of fairness in this game, because it is a very important aspect. The businessman must be fair to his fellow businessmen and to the consumers.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the aspect of fairness is to explain what is unfair. This is normally known as hoarding or monopoly. Sometimes a businessman or a group of businessmen buys a certain commodity in large quantities. The supply becomes short in relation to the demand. Therefore, the price goes up. Neither the short supply nor the higher price is natural. Both have been artificially created by hoarding. It is only because the commodity has been withdrawn from the market that the prices go up. This is the very purpose of those businessmen who combined efforts and bought the commodity. Their only interest is their own profit. Their practice is undoubtedly forbidden.

It may be suggested that in both cases businessmen have bought large quantities of a certain commodity. What makes the first practice legitimate while the other is forbidden? The answer is that in the second case, the whole process is artificial. In the first one, it is natural. In order to differentiate one from the other an important condition must be met. That is, the commodity itself must remain in good supply in the market throughout the period between buying it at cheap prices in season and releasing it later.When the commodity is not available, the businessmen who bought it in season must release it. Otherwise, they become hoarders and their practice is no longer legitimate. The

difference between the two situations is very simple. Every businessman must understand this and should be careful lest he steps over the boundaries of legitimate practices.

•Inheritance by illegitimate child

If a child is conceived before marriage, is he entitled to share of his father's inheritance when the father dies? If so, will this be on the same level as the shares of his brothers and sisters born after marriage?

As you realize, all sexual contact outside wedlock is strictly forbidden in Islam. This is part of the very serious view Islam takes of morality. Although the punishments prescribed for adultery and fornication differ in severity, with the severer punishment reserved to married adulterers, the fact that a punishment has been prescribed by Allah for such actions is more than enough to indicate their seriousness.

However, a basic principle in Islamic justice is that no one bears the blame for another's fault. A child born as a result of an illegitimate relationship suffers no adverse discrimination on account of his parents' sin. However, such a child cannot prove that he is the son of his father unless the father acknowledges him. If the father makes such an acknowledgement, he is not asked about the circumstances of the birth of his child. His statement is accepted.

Take for example the case of a young couple who get married after the woman is pregnant. The legitimacy of their first child is a question that no one will raise, since they have taken the right steps to bring the child into their family home. The child will inherit from his parents, along with his brothers and sisters, according to Islamic law, which gives a son twice the share of the daughter.

•Bath with pants on

Some people insist on having their pants on when they take a bath for grand ablution. Is this correct?

When we take a bath as a religious requirement, such as to remove the state of ceremonial impurity or on a Friday, we should make sure of properly washing every part of our bodies. At the same time, when a Muslim takes a bath, he should not allow his private

parts and the area close to them to be seen by anyone. If one is taking a bath in the type of bathroom which we have nowadays in our houses, there is no need to keep one's pants on while taking a bath. Indeed, it is better to remove them, in order to make sure that every part of one's body is properly washed. On the other hand, if one is doing his grand ablution by a dip into the sea or a swimming pool, or indeed having a bath outdoors, he must make sure that he is properly screened. Otherwise, he may wear something to prevent himself being seen.

•Marriage, dower & other payments

1. You have spoken earlier on dower and dowry stating that Islam approves only of the first which means a payment by the man to his prospective wife. May I say that, contrary to what you have implied, this is the practice followed in most parts of the Indian Sub-continent. May I also ask about the practice in a number of Arab countries where the dower is used by the wife or her family to buy furniture for the man's house? How far is this in line with Islamic practice? What is its effect on encouraging or discouraging early marriages?

2. May I ask what is the purpose of paying dower to one's prospective wife? We know that since it is an order of Islam, we must fulfil it without question. However, it is far better to know the purpose of what Islam requires of us.

3. You have mentioned in the past that a lady companion of the Prophet agreed to be married to Abu Talhah on the condition that he becomes a Muslim. She did not have any dower, but considered his acceptance of Islam as her dower. What I would like to know is whether people can be tempted to become Muslims just for the sake of marriage?

When a man and a woman get married, the new relationship imposes certain obligations on each one of them. When you try to evaluate these obligations against the rights that each of them will enjoy, you will find that, generally speaking, it is the man who stands to benefit more by the new relationship. Although Islam maintains equality between men and women and provides a system which helps each of them fulfil the roles for which they are best suited, on balance, the man has more to gain. He establishes a home and a family and is likely to have children and find a comfortable home when he comes back from work.

Moreover, he has a partner with whom he may fulfil his natural desire in a legitimate way. In return for this extra benefit, he has to pay a dower to his prospective wife.

I have explained that this is a condition of Islamic marriage. The dower is payable in advance, or at the time of making the marriage contract. If it is specified at the time of the contract, then the amount mentioned is the dower which the woman gets. If it is unspecified, the contract is valid but the wife continues to be entitled to receive a dower. The man and his wife may agree on its amount after marriage. However, if they cannot agree on a specific amount, the woman may refer the matter to an Islamic court which will give her an amount equal to that normally received by women in her social standing when they get married. In other words, the court will consider how much has been given to her sisters and cousins and will order that she be paid an amount similar to them. If a dower is still not paid, it remains due for the wife. When she is divorced, she may claim it. When her husband dies, it is payable to her as a debt. As you know, the first payment out of the estate of any deceased person is the settlement of his debts.

To sum up, dower is paid by the man in return for the benefits he receives as a result of his marriage. Therefore, the dower must be of benefit to the woman herself. She has sole discretion over its usage. She may spend it on her own needs, invest it or keep it. Nobody may harass her either to forego it or to spend it in a particular manner. The benefit which a woman may receive as her dower need not be financial or material. That is the case mentioned with respect to marriage of Abu Talhah, the companion of the Prophet.

Perhaps I should explain here that Abu Talhah was a man of admirable character. This was clearly seen in the battle of Uhud as well as many other situations. In Uhud he was one of those who remained with the Prophet when the bulk of the Muslim army was in disarray. He defended the Prophet most courageously and helped protect him from the determined attack by the polytheists who had resolved to kill him. His was a shining character among the companions of the Prophet. When he proposed to a Muslim lady, she realized that he would make a very good husband. However, he was not a Muslim at that time. She told him that he was not one to be refused, but since he was not a Muslim she could not marry him. If he was ready to be a Muslim, she would not require him to pay her any dower. His embracing Islam was her dower.

There is no doubt that the lady in question has made a great benefit by his marriage. She won to Islam a man of high courage and integrity who was certain to appreciate the value of Islam, once he knew enough about its principles and practices. She certainly hoped for a great reward by Allah. If any woman finds herself in a similar situation and is certain of the

character of the man who wants to marry her and follow the example of this lady companion of the Prophet, then her marriage may be blessed. As for tempting a woman to become Muslim in return for marriage, this should be looked at differently. The marriage of Abu Talhah ensured a benefit to the lady in the form of reward from Allah, but the benefit will be the man's when he offers marriage to a woman in return of her becoming a Muslim. The dower should be something which gives her a personal benefit.

Another example of moral benefit which may be considered a dower is the case provided by the Prophet when he was asked by one of his companions what to do when he had no money to give to the woman to whom he had proposed. The Prophet asked him whether he knew any surahs of the Qur'an. When he answered in the affirmative, he made it a condition of the marriage that the man would teach his wife the same surahs of the Qur'an. That was all the dower the man was required to pay. Again here there is a clear benefit to the woman because learning parts of the Qur'an will ensure reward from Allah.

What I mentioned about the system in the Indian sub-continent was that the dower is quite often a nominal sum or a formality which is part of the whole ritual. On the wedding night, the bride declares to her husband that she foregoes her right to the dower. She does this either because she is taught to do so, or as a result of the husband's pleading that he does not have the money. The first letter suggests that I have been misinformed. I might have been, but I go only by what I am told. [Added: No you are not mis-informed. In some communities that is precisely the case.] I have received numerous letters from my readers over the years that for a girl to get married, her father or brother must go to the trouble of buying gold or some other stuff to tempt the bridegroom. The more she has, the better her chances of marrying well. I have also heard this from friends who come from that part of the world.

Now that you are mentioning that prevalent system is more in line with Islamic teachings, which makes the dower a condition of the validity of marriage and the amount is actually paid to the bride and she exercises her sole discretion over its usability, I am certainly glad to hear it. It may be the case, however, that both types exist in different parts of the subcontinent. Be that as it may, what we are concerned with here is the Islamic system, not the practice of any particular community.

What you have mentioned about the practice in some Arab countries is certainly true. The bridegroom pays a dower, but the family of the bride takes it and adds to it, probably an equivalent amount or even more and spend the money on the bride's costumes and furniture for the home of the new family. This is again something that is not encouraged

by Islam. Islam promotes marriage and does not create difficulties for the prospective partners. Such financial requirements tend to discourage or delay marriages. It should be added, however, that the furniture remains the property of the woman for as long as the marriage continues. If it is dissolved, she takes it back. In certain Arab countries, when a marriage ends up in divorce, the court will assume that all the furniture in the family home belongs to the wife. The husband has to prove that he bought a certain article himself for the court to allow him to take it away. It should be stated, however, that this is not the sort of complication Islam encourages. Indeed, providing a furnished home for a family is the responsibility of the husband. When the wife refuses her dower to buy furniture, she is not making the best use of her dower, except in the sense that she is free to forgo any part of the dower for the husband. Here she is forgoing the usage of the furniture. In this case, tradition gets mixed up with Islamic teachings. I would prefer a clear-cut arrangement where the woman may get a smaller dower, but the husband provides the furniture.

•Complications in inter-faith marriages.

Some eight years ago I married a Christian woman who declared before our marriage that she has become a Muslim. Now she wants to return to her original religion. She did not at all pray according to Islamic way after our marriage. I always tried to see her as a Muslim woman, but she seems intent on reverting to Christianity. What effect would that have on our marriage? We have no children.

It is permissible for a Muslim man to marry a Christian or a Jewish woman. This means that your wife need not have changed her religion in order for your marriage to go through. She could have remained a Christian and your marriage would have been valid.

Perhaps I should add here that although an inter-faith marriage of this type is allowed, it is by no means encouraged, because inter-faith marriages often run into difficulties.

When a person, whether a man or a woman, renounces Islam, his or her marriage is automatically rendered invalid, because of the apostasy involved. In a situation like yours, where the wife became a Muslim, her apostasy invalidates your marriage and you may not be reunited in marriage any longer. It is different from a straightforward divorce which can be revoked and the marriage reinstated. Moreover, that woman is not permissible for any Muslim man to marry. She is not treated like an ordinary Christian. She is treated as an apostate. Therefore, if your wife decides to revert to Christianity, you consider your

marriage at an end. However, you may have to comply with certain requirements of the law of your country, such as the registration of divorce.

But then, may I ask you whether your wife was ever a Muslim? Is it you who can answer this question. She may have declared that she has converted to Islam, but how far was this genuine? Did she ever believe in the message of Prophet Muhammad and consider the Qur'an as the Divine Book which should be implemented at least in your family life? If the answer is in the negative, then the whole affair of her conversion to Islam was a joke. No one is allowed to take Islam other than seriously. If you are living in a Muslim country and your case comes before an Islamic Court and she states that she was not serious when she declared that she was a Muslim, the court will take that statement as an offence against Islam.

You should explain all this to your wife and let her decide for herself. Islam does not believe in compulsion in matters of religion. If she says that she wants to go back to Christianity, you tell her that your marriage is automatically nullified. You should leave her immediately in that case. If, after being told of the implications, she decides to remain a Muslim, you have to take positive steps in order to educate her in the principles of Islam and explain to her what duties Islam expects her to fulfil. You should try to encourage her to adopt gradually an Islamic way of life. As she gets to know more and more about Islam, I am sure she will be more and more convinced of its truth.

•Return of sold goods

I sold an article to an acquaintance having received half of the price and agreed to spread the remainder over two months. She was unable to pay after the first month, and after the second month she wanted to return the article because she was going back home. She gave me a small sum of money as penalty for not completing the purchase. Am I allowed to receive such penalty.

The Prophet advises us to accept returned goods when the purchaser regrets having bought them. Obviously, such an acceptance presupposes that by parting with it to the purchaser in the first place and receiving it back, no loss is incurred. In other words, if you buy a suit from a shop and find it at home that it is not particularly suitable to you; after trying you feel you want return it. If you take it back the following day, then the shopkeeper is recommended by the Prophet to take it back. However, if the suit gets

stained while it is with you such as might have happened if you dropped some food on it, then the shopkeeper is at a disadvantage if he takes it back. He cannot sell it when it is dirty, and if he sends it to be dry cleaned, it may lose its appeal. If he is to overlook this, its dry cleaning will cost him some money, as well as time and effort. In this case, he is entitled to recover that loss from the purchaser, although it is open to him to refuse to take it back.

In your case, if the article which you sold was returned unused, as you have implied, and taking it back will not mean any loss for you, then the penalty should not be taken. If you take it as compensation for missing a chance to sell the article while it was with your customer, you are not taking forbidden money, but it is much better not to accept it, especially if you know that your customer is not that rich. From the Islamic point of view, it is better to have all our dealings coloured by a spirit of compassion and care than exacting our rights to the full.

•Investing zakah money

I plan to establish a trust out of zakah and charity (i.e. sadaqah) money and invest such funds in some profitable business. My plan is to distribute the annual earnings of the business to deserving students on merit. How far is this acceptable, taking in view that this will serve the community for a longer period?

The idea of setting up a trust fund and investing the proceeds to ensure annual returns which can be given to the poor is a very sound one. However, zakah money cannot be used for such a purpose. The reason is that zakah money must be paid to its beneficiaries when it is due. Once you set aside your zakah liability, it no longer belongs to you. How, then, do you allow yourself to dispense with it in a way which you determine? This money belongs to Allah and He has given you instructions on how to distribute it. It must be distributed straight away. Moreover, its beneficiaries must be put in possession of it. When you put it in a trust fund, you are taking it away from its beneficiaries without their consent. May be they need it for a more immediate use. How can you, or indeed anyone for that matter, deny them that privilege.

Moreover, when you invest zakah money, you are actually putting it at risk of loss. This is not acceptable from the Islamic point of view. It may be true that the likelihood of loss is very slim indeed. But as long as there is a risk, then no human being can claim the authority to expose zakah money to such a risk.

You may, however, put the voluntary donations for charitable purposes into such fund and invest that money, provided that the investment is a very low risk one. You may consider in this respect buying some property and letting it out. This is indeed a very low-risk investment. Moreover, the returns are sure. If you opt for such an action, the charitable donation you make will earn you more reward as long as it is in operation.

•Uttering simple lies

My grandmother is over 90. Sometimes we tell her little lies to please her. Is it acceptable from the Islamic point of view.

The Prophet was asked by one of his companions about the cardinal sins and whether a Muslim may be guilty of any of them. With every one of them the Prophet said that a Muslim may commit such a sin. But when he was asked whether a true believer may lie, his answer was an emphatic 'No'. Indeed, the instructions against lying in all situations are both clear and numerous. There is no situation which makes a lie acceptable, except in three cases: when the purpose is to achieve reconciliation between two quarreling people, or lying to the enemy of a Muslim state or Muslim community and when a man lies to his wife or she lies to him. Perhaps a word is needed here to explain each of these situations. If a mediator trying to achieve reconciliation between two people goes to each of them and tells him that the other has been speaking highly of him, when he has not, this is acceptable. Similarly, lying in order to protect the Muslim community from its enemies or to foil the enemy's designs is also acceptable. Indeed it is encouraged if it is the only way to achieve that end. Again, when a man tells his wife that he loves her, such a lie is acceptable. Similarly, when a wife assures her husband of her unfailing love in order to maintain a happy family atmosphere, knowing that her feelings towards him are not that passionate, she commits no sin.

Obviously, the case of you and your grand-mother does not fall under any of these three headings. To tell her a lie whether to please her or to have a little laugh at her expense is unacceptable from the Islamic point of view. Indeed it is forbidden.

•Can step-children be beneficiaries of zakah?

Could you please consider the case of a widow with three children who were about to be thrown out on the street by the landlord for failing to pay

the rent. Having heard of what had happened, a kind hearted neighbour took the widow and her children into his home, married the woman and supported her and her children. Despite being married for some time, they are not blessed with a child. I wonder whether an action of this nature fulfils the duty of zakah, or must the man continue to pay zakah? It is said that if someone gives away a young girl in marriage, paying all her expenses, he fulfils the fifth pillar of Islam. Is this true?

There is no doubt that bringing up a young child who has been left without a.guardian or without money is an act of kindness which Allah views very favourably. He rewards for it very generously. As you know, every good action is rewarded at least ten times its value. When an act of charity is done to a deserving, helpless young child from whom one does not expect any return, such an action will be rewarded by Allah at the different level. Allah increases the reward for a good action which is done with sincerity and with the sole intention of pleasing Him and multiplies this reward seven hundred times or even more. When a family is left destitute and a person takes them into his home and looks after them, his action merits great reward. When the man has confirmed that the widow has no one to support her or her children and feels that he cannot abandon them, he must regularize his relationship with this family. If he cannot provide the woman with separate accommodation, he should consider marrying her. Otherwise, problems could arise from the fact that she is living in his home, even though she has young children. It seems to me that the man in this case has been aware of all the points to be considered in his relationship with this family and he has married the mother, in order to look after her and after her children. May Allah reward him generously for his kindness.

Whatever the circumstances, this gentleman has done something highly commendable when he married the widow and started to look after her three children. Now he is wondering whether his action can be considered against his zakah. In other words, he wants to do a set off which relieves him of the duty of zakah while he continues to support the orphan children. Before we answer him on whether this is possible or not, let us first consider whether the three children qualify as beneficiaries of zakah generally, and from their stepfather in particular. We have to assume that the children have no money of their own. Otherwise, their mother would not have been on the verge of being thrown out on the street for failing to pay the rent for her previous accommodation. Hence, this maybe taken as evidence that they are poor or needy. As such, they may receive zakah funds.

The upbringing of young children is the responsibility of their father. If he dies, leaving them young, then the responsibility is taken over by their next of kin. If their grandfather is alive, he is responsible for their upbringing. If he is not, an elder brother or a brother of their father has to look after them. When no such next of kin is available to support, then the Muslim state will look after them. If they live in a non-Muslim country, then the Muslim community is collectively responsible for their upbringing. A stepfather is not duty bound to support the children of his wife, unless he has committed himself to do so voluntarily. Unless it is regulated by a specific contract, this is a moral commitment. In view of the foregoing, the children in this case may receive zakah from their stepfather, since they are not his dependents. A Muslim cannot pay his zakah to someone whom he is duty bound to support. Thus he cannot pay it to his mother, or to his children or grand children. It is his duty to support these relatives. Therefore, if he pays them his zakah, he is paying it to himself.

Having said that, I must explain that there cannot be a straight forward set off, relieving the man from paying zakah against his upbringing of the orphans. What he should do, however, is to calculate his zakah and set it aside at the appropriate date. He may wish to pay the whole amount to his step-children. If they are very young, he may start to spend the money on their needs as he thinks fit, since he is their guardian. Alternatively, he may give it to their mother to buy a few things for them. If they can be trusted not to squander the money, as it is the case when they are teenagers, then he can put them in possession of it, as a zakah recipient must have zakah paid to him.

it may be that he spends on them much more than the amount of zakah he has to pay. Nevertheless, he cannot just ignore calculating his zakah liability. He must have this calculation and the money must be set aside. When rules are made, they take into consideration all possible cases. Someone in the same position as the questioner may have a large amount of zakah to pay, which could be far in excess of what he pays to bring up his wife's children. If the principle of set off is to be applied, then some zakah recipients are bound to suffer.

The second case of footing the bill for marrying a young girl being equated with performing pilgrimage should be argued in the same way. Providing a family home for such a girl is highly commendable action. It will certainly earn high reward from Allah. But it cannot be placed on the same level as offering the pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is a duty owed to Allah by every one of us who can afford to undertake the journey. The nature of pilgrimage is a journey to perform certain acts of worship at a specific time in certain places.

In other words, it is different in nature from arranging a marriage or spending money in order to secure a family home for a young girl.

Generous indeed as this second action is, it cannot be equated with pilgrimage. How, then, can it be viewed as compensation for it? The person who arranges such a marriage for a girl in order to protect her against sin or to secure her future may earn highly generous reward from Allah, which may exceed that of pilgrimage, depending on the particular circumstances of the case. But even then, the duty of pilgrimage remains owing to Allah from the man who has arranged this marriage. He is required to fulfil this duty at least once in his lifetime.

Having said that, I would like to add that heaven may be likened to a big garden or a palace with so many doors. A person who wants to get into that garden or that palace may enter through any of these doors. Once he has entered, he is already in. He should not worry too much over which door he got through. The most important thing is that he gets in. Heaven has so many doors: one of them is pilgrimage, another is charity, a third is jihad, a fourth is fasting, a fifth is night worship, etc. A person who manages to get admitted into heaven scores a great success. Whether he does it through pilgrimage, jihad or generous charity is of no consequence.

•A woman's appearance

1. Is it permissible for a woman not to comply with her husband's wishes with regard to her appearance, if he asks her to wear make-up or to have her hair styled in a certain fashion?
2. Is there any clear instruction in the Qur'an or Hadith which requires Muslim women to cover their heads during their normal day-to-day activity?

1. Let us first of all be clear about the situation we are talking about. What the husband is requesting applies within the family home, when he is with his wife and children, not having a party at home where men and women mix together. If so, then a woman is strongly advised by the Prophet to make herself appealing to her husband. By doing so, she helps him feel completely satisfied with what he has at home. He does not look to others, wishing that his wife does the same as them. Also, a man is recommended not to neglect his appearance. While everyone likes to be relaxed at home, putting on the same dress day after day and totally neglecting one's appearance is bound to have a negative

effect on one's partner. This applies in both cases. Indeed, it is a wise woman who takes care to dress well when her husband is about to come back from work.

Let us take the example of hair style. If a man comes home to find his wife wearing her home dress, having been in the kitchen all the time, with her hair dishelved, he is bound to compare her with other women he may see in the street, at the office or on television. He feels that there is something missing in his family life. If he likes his wife to wear her hair short and she refuses, he is bound to be upset. She may protest to him that it is un-Islamic for a woman to wear her hair short, as many people believe. This is in fact a mistaken notion. It is more traditional of certain societies. If a woman wears her hair short, she commits no offence, provided that she does not appear in front of men other than her husband, father, brothers or uncles. To assume that it is forbidden for a woman to cut her hair short is totally mistaken.

2. Verse 31 of Surah 24, entitled "Light" or "An-Noor" deals with what women may reveal and what they must hide. It states this instruction to believing women: "*Let them draw their head coverings over their bosoms.*" What this instruction means is that a Muslim woman must have a head cover which she should draw over her bosom to cover her neck and chest. She should do that when she appears before men who are not related to her or rather men to whom she can be married.

In a Hadith, which I have quoted quite often (in these columns), the Prophet tells his sister-in-law, Asmaa' bint Abu Bakr: "Asmaa', when a woman attains puberty, nothing maybe seen of her except this and this." (The Prophet pointed to his face and to the lower parts of his arms.)

You have here a clear instruction in the Qur'an and in the Hadith. With such conclusive evidence, no one may argue that covering her head is not required of a Muslim woman.

•Sa'ie and jogging with a woman companion

If one is doing the sa'ie with a woman companion, his wife or mother, what should they do in the area where pilgrims are required to jog? Should the man not jog or should the woman jog in order to stay together.

Jogging between the two green lights in sa'ie is recommended for men but not for women. Therefore, if you are doing the sa'ie in the company of a woman and you fear that if you leave her to do the jogging and wait for her at the end of the distance, you may lose her because of the over-crowding or if you think that your stopping at the end will cause inconvenience to other people, then it is better to dispense with the jogging and confine yourself to walking normally alongside your woman companion.

•Prophet's Mosque and forty prayers

When one goes to Madina, is it obligatory that he stays for eight days and offers forty obligatory prayers at the Prophet's Mosque?

Visiting the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah is a sunnah, i.e. recommended. It is neither obligatory not part of the duties of pilgrimage. There is no time restriction attached to such a visit to the Prophet's Mosque. It can be done over a very short period and it can be a very long visit. This depends on personal circumstances. What we know is that a prayer offered in the Prophet's Mosque is rewarded as one thousand prayers elsewhere, with the exception of the Grand Mosque in Makkah. Therefore, to offer forty obligatory prayers in the Prophet's Mosque earns handsome reward. But to offer more earns more reward. Having said that, I would like to reiterate that a short visit is perfectly valid and well rewarded. You can go to Madinah by plane in the morning, offer the Zuhr and Asr prayers and come back later in the day to complete a highly rewarding sunnah. If your circumstances allow you to stay longer, well and good.

•Allah's will and His foreknowledge

A person who loses his job or money as a result of his negligence may blame Allah for that, saying that it is His will. The total earnings of a person in his lifetime are already determined by Allah. Why should a man work, then? Please explain what powers Allah has given to man. Normally we find hard workers well off while lazy people are poor.

Sometimes people find it easy to put the blame on Allah's will for what happens to them through their own faults. The example you have mentioned is a typical one. A person may be warned once or twice by his employers about negligence, but pays no heed. Eventually he finds himself out of job. He then starts to justify the whole thing as

something that would have happened anyway, because it is Allah's will which cannot be stopped. But what is Allah's will in the matter?

What we have to understand is that Allah has placed man on earth and charged him with the task of building human life. He had given him his freedom of choice which makes him able to choose, in any situation, his course of action. This ability of man is part of Allah's will. Hence, it has to operate in human life. If it did not, then man would have been exactly like animals who have no say in how they live and how they are affected by the world around them. Allah has also willed that the law of cause and effect will operate to the full in human life. Thus, if a man exposes himself to severe wintry weather, he gets cold and he feels himself in need of having a fire or a source of heating nearby. It is Allah's will which makes man affected by weather conditions. It is also Allah's will to give man the ability to think about what sort of action he could take to reduce the severity of the situation in which he finds himself. He thus thinks about having some sort of heating. It is Allahs' will to make the man able to decide whether to switch the heating on or not. But whether man chooses to switch it on or not is his own action, determined by his free choice. If he does, he gets warmer. If he does not, he continues to suffer in the cold. There maybe some constraints which motivate man to act in a certain fashion, but it is he who weighs up the possibilities open to him and makes his own decision. If a man decides not to switch his heater on, he cannot blame Allah's will for being cold.

You can say the same thing about almost everything in life. A person who stays at home doing nothing will earn no wages from anywhere. He cannot blame Allah or His will for not having enough to live on. It is his own decision not to go out to work and, consequently, not have any wages. Had he sought some employment or started some trade and, having had it, continued to discharge his duties and do his work to the best of his ability, he would have his salary or profit, as the case may be. It is Allah's will to organize human life in such a way as to make work a means to earn a livelihood. But it is a man's choice whether to work or not.

We have to differentiate here between what Allah knows beforehand of what will happen to us during our lifetime and what He has predestined for us. He has certainly determined in advance the life duration of every one of us. He has written when and how each one of us dies. According to an authentic Hadith, when a human being is still an embyro in his mother's belly, an angel is sent to him to breathe spirit into him. The angel also writes down his life duration, livelihood and whether he will come out of this life happy or miserable. But this does not mean a predestination with regard to what a person may earn in his life. This is only a reference to Allah's advance knowledge of what will happen to

each one of us. As you realize, time, as we know it, does not apply to Allah. The succession of night and day, by which we calculate months, years, etc. is a natural phenomenon caused by the position of the earth in relation to the sun and the fact that the earth is in a continuous movement round itself and, at the same time, moves in orbit around the sun. Hence, time is a very accidental phenomenon. It does not apply to Allah.

Allah's foreknowledge of a man's livelihood does not mean that a man will end up having the same amount of money, whether he works or not. To believe this is to take a very naive attitude. The fact is that man's earnings are dependent on his work, but Allah who has full knowledge of everything knows in advance what sort of work every person will do and how much he will earn for it. The knowledge of Allah does not impose on a man a certain level of earnings.

We can compare this to the productivity of the earth. Allah has given the earth the ability to be cultivated and to yield all sorts of agricultural produce. If man makes use of this quality which Allah has given to the earth, every one will have enough to eat. However, if man does not cultivate the earth, its surface will be covered with wild plants, few of which are edible and many are not. If man then goes hungry, he cannot put the blame on Allah. If two neighbours share a plot of land and one of them plants apple trees in his part, while the other does not, the latter cannot say that Allah's will has prevented him from having apples in his land. Indeed, it is Allah's will which has given the first one his apples, but the realization of Allah's will has come about through man's effort.

•Allah's will and man's doing

Allah has committed Himself to grant victory to those who support His cause and fight to defend His faith. But this is conditional on certain things: that the whole concept of faith must be deeply entrenched in their hearts, that the practical implications of faith must manifest themselves in their organization and behaviour and that they must equip themselves with all the means to achieve victory and exert their maximum effort. This is the law of nature which Allah has set in operation and which gives favour to no one. When the believers fall short of meeting any of these conditions, they have to accept the consequences. The fact that they are Muslims does not mean that the laws of nature should be suspended or abrogated for their sake.

Everything in this world takes place in accordance with Allah's will and His predestination, and serves His overall purpose. Man's thoughts, movement, action and will are part of

Allah's law, which He uses in order to accomplish whatever He wishes. Nothing of man's thoughts, movement, action or will lies outside of, or in confrontation with, the law and rules of nature.

•Allah's will & man's choice

When something happens, we say that it has happened by Allah's will. But then we say that man is required to abide by Islamic teachings and he will be either rewarded or punished for his actions. I realize that certain things like health and illness, birth and death, etc. are out of our control. But I have also heard it being said that with regard to financial earnings, a man cannot exceed what Allah has fixed for him. It is up to him to earn his money through legitimate or illegitimate means. At the same time, when someone has a large number of children, people will say Allah will provide for them. Could you please comment on these points.

No believer will question the fact that it is Allah who has created the universe and who has set all the rules of nature in operation. On the basis of this common acceptability, everyone agrees that weather conditions, birth and death as well as effects of natural forces and conditions on man happen by Allah's will. We are not considering here the argument of non-believers who try to explain these phenomena away, by saying that they are the product of natural forces and natural laws. When you ask them who has devised these natural laws and set them in operation, they have no convincing answer. But to a believer who accepts that all these have been put into existence by Allah's will, no conflict arises between the divine will and his own choice.

What is very important to remember is that it has been Allah's will to create man with the ability to determine his own actions. Moreover, human life is made in such a way that man is influenced by his own actions. When you do something,its results must affect you in one way or another. If they were to have no effect at all on you, then you lose the motivation or the incentive to do anything at all.

The point you have mentioned with regard to a person's earnings is rather misleading. A government employee who can get away with embezzlement of funds and remains in his job for several years will be able to amass a wealth which he could not hope to have received otherwise. We cannot say, therefore, that he would have ended up with the same amount of money whether he resorted to embezzlement or chose to be honest and not to take a single riyal in an illegitimate way. If this is true, people will sit idle and wait for their provisions to come to them. Similarly, a person who drinks or smokes will have the ill-effects of both substances. A smoker is likely to develop lung cancer or heart disease or any one of the other diseases associated with smoking. If he does not smoke, the likelihood of him suffering any of these diseases is greatly reduced. The same applies to alcoholic drinks and their effects on health. We cannot, then say that whatever man does, he will end up suffering the same diseases. Nevertheless, you have accepted that our health condition is part of Allah's will. How can we reconcile these two sets of facts?

The answer is simple. Everything operates according to Allah's will. Nicotine, which is the poisonous substance in tobacco, produces its effects by Allah's will. It is He who has given it its qualities. Therefore, when man inhales this substance, he cannot escape its cumulative effects on his health. This effect is, therefore, produced by Allah's will. What this means is that when man inhales nicotine he sets up Allah's will to operate on him in a certain manner. When he refrains from smoking, he sets it to operate in a different manner. In both cases, he is subject to Allah's will, but the end result is widely different.

The other point which we have to clarify here is Allah's advance knowledge of what we are going to do in our lives. Allah knows before He creates any man or woman or indeed any creature what this creature will do and what others will do to it and what will happen to it at every moment of its life. He knows who of us will be a chain smoker and who, like myself, cannot stand the smell of tobacco. He similarly knows who will have lung cancer as a result of smoking and who will be spared that agony. This knowledge does not interfere with man's choice. It is not the way that Allah has created a particular person that influences which make him take up this dangerous habit. In the final resort, it is his choice which determines what happens to him.

As you see, there is no conflict between Allah's will and man's choice. Man's choice is indeed part of Allah's will, in the sense that it is He who has given man this ability, told him of its effect on him and allowed him to exercise this freedom of choice throughout his life. This is what makes man accountable for his choices. If his choice was not a free one,

accountability would not come into it, in the same way as all animals are not accountable for their actions. They do not have free choice.
As for children and what Allah provides for them, again this is a simple matter. Allah tell us in the Qur'an that everything that walks on earth will have its provision set for it by Allah. Nevertheless, if we were to stop working and consume what the earth produces of vegetables, fruit and cereal, etc. we will very soon go through all that is available on earth and find out that we have nothing to sustain us for another day. At the same time, when we work we are able to increase production manifold.

If you were to ask any scientist one hundred years ago whether the earth will be able to support five billion people, his answer would have been a decisive 'no'. Nor would he have imagined that the population would reach this figure in 1988. His answer was most probably according to his knowledge of the potentials of the earth. He could not have imagined the effects of electricity and other sources of energy on man's productivity. The earth could not have supported this number of people if we were still using the same agricultural and industrial techniques we were using one hundred years ago. In this example, man's work is a very important factor in the equation of productivity and consumption. It is the means with which we are working that make all the difference. Allah has certainly given us the potential to earn our living and the living of our families. But He will not just send us an extra sum of money every month, which will come to us through a special post simply because we have another child. When you have a large family you have to work harder in order to earn more to support your wife and children. When you do work harder, Allah gives you the fruit of your work.

Having said that, I must clarify that I include within "working harder" what every one of us tries to do when he is coping with a greater responsibility, namely, to look for more opportunities to help one's family. That such opportunities do occur is part of Allah's will. Whether we take them up or not is our choice.

•Hadith - a revelation or intuition

If Hadith is not revelation, can it be termed as "lofty intuition"?

Hadith is much more than what can be described as 'lofty intuition'. Everything that the Prophet has taught us of our religion has been revealed to him. The Qur'an is revealed in meaning and in word and every Muslim believes that every single word in the Qur'an is Allah's own word. A sacred or Qudsi Hadith is the one which the Prophet attributes to Allah Himself, by stating something to this effect: "Allah, the Most Sublime, says...".

There is no doubt that such sacred Hadiths have been revealed to the Prophet in meaning. Many scholars say that they are also revealed by Allah in word. However, the difference between them and the Qur'an is that they have been conveyed to us through a chain of single narrators, rather than chains of numerous narrators at every stage, which is the mark of the Qur'an. Unlike the Qur'an, a sacred Hadith may not be recited in prayer, nor is its recitation an aspect of worship.

Ordinary Hadith is the word of the Prophet, although in meaning it is revealed. The Prophet has not given us anything concerning our religion of his own accord. Everything that relates to our faith has been revealed by Allah. However, such revelations are put in Hadith in the Prophet's own words. We cannot say that it is the word of Allah. Statements are attributed to their authors who shape and express them the way they like. In short, the meaning of Hadith is revelation, but its wording we attribute to the Prophet.

•Martyrs

Martyrs are only those who are killed when they fight for Allah's cause with pure and total devotion. Such martyrs, as we learn, are alive, enjoying all the characteristics of life. They are "provided for" by their Lord, and they are jubilant at what Allah bestows on them of His bounty, and they rejoice at what they learn of the destiny of the believers they had left behind, and they are aware of the events that take place here in our world. All these are characteristics of the living: enjoyment, jubilation, being concerned, influencing events and being influenced. Why should anyone then grieve for parting with them when they are still alive and they have their ties with the living and with events?

> *[Do not think of those who are killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Indeed, they are living in the presence of their Lord and are well provided for. Jubilant are they because of what Allah has bestowed on them of His bounty, and rejoicing at the happy news that those who have not joined them, but are left behind, shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they grieve. They rejoice at the glad tiding of Allah's grace and bounty and that Allah will not allow the reward of the believers to be lost. - The House of Imran, Aal Imran : 3; 169-171]*

•Jumm'atul-Wida - Last Friday in Ramadan

Does the last Friday in the month of Ramadan have any particular significance? In our part of the world, people celebrate this Friday with a special sermon and the distribution of sweets. Please comment.

No particular significance is associated with the last Friday in Ramadan. It is true the day is marked in a special fashion in certain communities, but there is nothing in the Qur'an or the sunnah to support this. However, every Friday is an important day to Muslims, since it includes an hour when supplication and prayers are answered. When this is combined with the worship of fasting, every Friday in Ramadan has double blessing. A Muslim who is fasting well,observing all the requirements of fasting is bound to feel the effects of this blessed worship as he is closer to being God-fearing than on other days in the year. As he is fasting, he is in a worship which Allah describes as unique. When these two blessings are combined, then one is closer to Allah. His supplication and prayer is certain to be answered. He should make good use of the occasion. But that should not mean that the occasion should be marked in a special way. It need not be.

•Gambling practices

Could you please tell me whether the following practices fall within forbidden gambling :

1. Gifts offered by shops and stores through a draw of envelopes or raffles.
2. Selling one's articles or belongings through raffles. May I say that this is the quickest way of selling one's belongings when one is leaving the country. The pricé is divided into a number of portions which are sold as raffle tickets and a draw is made to determine who gets the article.

There is no doubt that all forms of gambling are forbidden. However, the first practice, as I understand it, may be no more than a promotional activity by shopkeepers and department stores. If you go to a shop to buy an article, say for 80 riyals and the shopkeeper tells you if you increase your purchase to 100 riyals or more, you will be entitled to draw an envelope which gives you a small gift which he does not specify, you have a choice to make. When you increase your purchase, you are not actually paying money in order to draw an envelope, or a raffle, but you are buying an additional article at its normal price. It is true that the shopkeeper does this in order to persuade you to increase your purchase, but ultimately the choice is yours. You are getting your article at

their real value. You are not buying the right to draw an envelope, but you are only being persuaded to buy something which you may not have bought at that particular time. You will not buy something which is of no use to you. I feel that this is simply a promotional exercise which gives you a little extra over what you have bought. Whatever envelope you draw will give you a little gift. It is true that some gifts will be more valuable than others, but then it is merely a gift and you cannot choose your gifts at any time.

As for the other practice, I am afraid it is a form of gambling. People buy these raffles and only one of them gets the article. The others lose their money. It is true that the seller receives only the fair price of the article, but what about those who lost their money. They are buying thin air. This is gambling or, at least a forbidden practice.

•Correspondence before engagement

Is it forbidden to correspond with one's future wife before the engagement, or even to see her, so that both can become acquainted with each other?

What is intriguing in the way you have phrased your question is your usage of the expression "future wife," in reference to your woman correspondent, even before you are engaged. How can you justify such a description? Be that as it may, the answer to your question depends on your answer to a number of questions which you have to put to yourself. How serious are both of you about going ahead with the marriage? Do her parents know of your correspondence? And do you write with the thought that your letters may be read by them? If so, are they good Muslims who abide by the teachings of Islam? If you are writing to the lady whom you call your"future wife" in secret, and if both of you fear that your letters may fall into the hands of her parents because they will be very angry with both of you and probably take measures to stop this correspondence, then there is something essentially wrong with this relationship, and it is forbidden. In principle, there is no objection to a man getting to know his prospective wife's character and to find out whether her manners, education, temperament, characteristics and other qualities are to his liking. A man needs to be sure that his marriage stands a good chance of success. When writing, however, Islamic standards of morality must be observed. Their must not be love letters of the type poets and film-makers try to glorify. The purpose should be clear, and once the person concerned has determined that the other party will be a good marriage partner or the reverse, he should take practical steps accordingly, either severing the relationship or regulating it into an engagement and marriage.

As for seeing her, a Muslim woman has to observe the Islamic standards of propriety and decorum. A man who wants to marry a certain woman may see her in the presence of one or both of her parents, or her adult brother in order to determine whether to go ahead with his proposal and marriage. To see a woman in secret, without the knowledge of her family is not allowed.

•Two congregations in a mosque.

In a mosque in our town, the followers of the Hanafi and Shaf'ie sects offer their prayers in two congregations, which are held separately but simultaneously, following two imams. Is this allowed?

This is an ugly aspect of ignorance which must be stopped altogether. When a person does not join a congregation, he must have serious doubts about the faith of the imam leading that congregation. If these doubts are based on the fact that the imam belongs to a different school of thought, then this attitude shows how ignorant the person is about the differences between the various schools of thought in Islam. If the two congregations start at the same time, both are invalid. If one starts after the other, then the second is invalid. What we know of the history of Imam El-Shaf'ie is that he went to Baghdad where he met with the leading figure of the Hanafi school and discussed important issues with Imam Abu Yousuf and others. As you are aware, Imam Abu Yousuf was the most important figure in the Hanafi school of thought following the death of his mentor, the rounder of the school, Imam Abu Hanifa. Imam El-Shaf'ie joined the congregations there without any question. What you should try to achieve is for the two imams in your local mosque to learn more about their schools of thought and how they differ from each other. Once they get to know more, they will feel that their attitude is ludicrous.

•Waiting period - the reason for

After a relative of mine was divorced, she had a new proposal. Because of certain circumstances, the man who has put in the proposal is in a hurry to get the marriage officially recorded. The problem is that she has not yet finished her waiting period. Since the waiting period is intended for establishing whether the divorcee is pregnant or not, is it permissible for her to establish that fact through pregnancy tests"? If she determines

that she is not pregnant, can she go ahead with the marriage, before the waiting period is over?

While it is true that an important purpose of waiting period is to establish whether a woman is pregnant or not, it is by no means the only purpose. In this particular point, there is a difference between the waiting period of a widow and that of a divorcee. In the case of a widow, the waiting period is longer in order to be absolutely certain whether there is a pregnancy or not. Moreover, the waiting period shows that the widow values here past relationship with her deceased husband. She does not immediately join with another man.

In the case of a divorcee, there are certain rules of paramount important. To start with, the waiting period is not calculated by months or days, but by periods of menstruation or cleanliness from it. If the woman is not pregnant, her waiting period extends for three menstrual periods. If she is too old or too young to have the periods, then she waits for three months. If she is pregnant, her waiting extends until she has given birth.

Whichever is the length of a woman's waiting period, she stays during that time in her husband's home. He is not allowed to turn her out and she need not leave. She is entitled to full maintenance by her husband throughout this period. He has the right to have the marriage resumed if both agree on that. In this case, they need not have a new marriage contract or have a fresh dower. This is a very important factor. [Added: This provides scope for reconciliation, which must not be taken away.]

When a woman is in her waiting period, she may not receive a new proposal by anyone. Nor is a man allowed to promise marriage to a woman who is in her waiting period. All that he can do is to give an implicit hint. On this basis, the answer to your particular question is that a doctor's opinion may establish that a divorcee is not pregnant, but that is not sufficient for her to have a new marriage. The rights which her first husband continues to have during her waiting period cannot be easily dispensed with. Even if he agrees to her new marriage, the rules cannot be changed.

•Obligation towards parents

Now that I am married, do I have any financial obligation towards my parents, when they have to pay debts to others?

Your attitude of helping parents settle their debts is highly commendable. Indeed, it is the attitude to be expected from every dutiful son. You cannot abandon your father and your mother to face creditors when you have money to help them.

Since that help went through your savings, you had no zakah to pay. Your wife is wrong to object to your helping your parents. You should not hesitate to continue to help them until their debts are settled. When you do so, you are not merely being dutiful, you are investing for your own and your children's future. If your wife objects, tell her that you would like to be sure that if in your old age you need your children's help, you will find it readily available. If you do not help your parents, how can you be sure that your children will help you when you grow old? Not only this, but when you help your parents, your children will be sure to find a helping hand should they need it when you have died.

It may be true that your parents got into debts as a result of your brother's fault. The fact remains that they are facing creditors and they have to pay these debts. If you are able to help, you must do so. It is greatly important that you should continue to help your parents. Let me remind you of the Hadith which mentions that the Prophet did not offer the prayer for the deceased i.e. janazah, when the body of a dead man was brought into the mosque for prayer, because the Prophet learned that the man left unsettled debts. When one of his companions volunteered to settle those debts, the Prophet offered that prayer for the deceased man. That shows how greatly important the payment of debt is, even after death. You cannot stand watching your parents if they are encumbered with these debts. Your help should always be forthcoming.

•Adoption of child and inheritance

Can a childless couple adopt a child? If so, will the child be entitled to inherit the property of the adopting couple?

I have spoken at length recently about adoption and made it absolutely clear that Islam does not allow it. It is forbidden in our faith. However, to bring up an orphan child is an act of charity which will be highly rewarded. But this must not be by way of adoption as such. The person who looks after an orphan should not call him his own child. The child must retain his or her name and must be called after his or her father. [Added: it may be that the the parenthood is not known to the family who takes upon itself to bring up an orphan child. In that case the child must be treated as a brethren. This does not alter the status of the directive in Islam and the child cannot be called their own child.]

Since adoption is not allowed altogether, the question of inheritance does not arise. However, if someone raises an orphan child, he can leave him a portion of his property by will. As you know, every person is allowed to bequeath by will up to one third of his property, but the beneficiaries of his will cannot include any of his heirs.

•Biscuits with 'surah' for improving memory

My son who is aged 12 is in the initial stage of memorizing the Qur'an. A friend of mine suggested to me to give him biscuits to eat after writing on them the surah 'Al-Fateha', or the Opening with saffron. I know the importance of this surah, but I am at a loss to understand how can it be used as energizer. To support his argument, my friend has shown me some religious books as reference. Your comments will be highly appreciated.

I am too at a loss to understand what your friend has suggested. You may ask your friend whether it is the biscuits, the saffron or the surah which helps the memorizing this way. Or is it perhaps the three together. Will the prescription work if you use the saffron to write on something other than biscuits? What if you write it with sugar or a mixture of spices? To my mind, this is an absolute absurdity. The Qur'an is not to be used in this way. It is far better for your son to start his session of memorization with reading the surah Al-Fateha, to put himself in the proper frame of mind for memorization. You may help him by a little prayer to Allah to help him. On the other hand, for any mental exercise, it helps if the boy is well nourished. This is not to say that he should eat before a session of memorization, but to have enough nourishment generally. Also it helps if he has enough recreation. In other words, you should not be too strict with your son, allowing him no time to play in order to attend to his lessons and memorization of the Qur'an. A boy at this age needs physical exercise and mental recreation.

You say that he showed you some books as reference, and you call these books religious. Let me tell you very briefly that not everything you read in a book which the author or the readers claim to be a religious book is correct. There is plenty of stuff claimed to be part of our religion which has no foundation whatsoever.

Therefore, when you find something contrary to common sense being claimed to be part of our religion, you should question it. Your questioning should be on the lines that you will need supporting evidence from the Qur'an or the authentic Hadith. If no such support is provided, then you hold it in doubt until you make sure of its correctness by asking a scholar who should be able to give you the religious argument for it. If he cannot give you

supporting evidence or a sound argument, then he probably is not a well read scholar. You then leave that thing altogether.

•Pendants with Qur'an

In our country, some people have Qur'anic verses written on a clean, white paper which is then wrapped with the use of incense and bound by a black cloth. This is worn as a necklace which is supposed to protect the person wearing it and give him some social prestige. Is this practice acceptable?

This sort of thing is known as a charm. The Prophet has told us that wearing such a charm is very strictly forbidden, and he has made his statement in the most emphatic way. He prayed to Allah never to grant the person who wears such a charm the wishes for which he wears it. As you realize, every prayer or supplication made by the Prophet is answered by Allah. The Prophet was once impressed by a poet who wrote a beautiful poem praising Islam and glorifying Allah. When the poet finished reciting the poem, the Prophet said to him "May your mouth be protected," which was the type of thing Arabs used to say to anyone who speaks well. That poet lived until the age of 130 without losing a single tooth. Numerous are the examples of how Allah answered every single prayer the Prophet said. Therefore, when he prays Allah not to grant the wishes of someone who does a particular action, then we are sure that those wishes will never be granted.

Let us reflect on the action of wearing a charm. It suggests that a particular object has certain powers. It may be said that the power is that of Allah, since it is Qur'anic verses that are written in such a charm. This is absolute rubbish because Allah's will does not work through the writing of Qur'anic verses or hanging a pendant with a few words from the Qur'an. [Added: or hanging a plaque with Qur'anic verses with that thinking. However, if the idea is that others may read the plaque and thereby be blessed by Allah for reading that part of Qur'an, then that is acceptable.] If one wants to rid himself of the effects of evil schemes worked by evil persons, then all he has to do is to supplicate to Allah to protect him. The Prophet has taught us so many prayers to say at different parts of the day and night. If we do, then we have that protection. When you make such a prayer, you are conscious of what you are saying. You are addressing Allah, showing your submission to Him. When you do so, He responds to your prayer. But when you wear a charm or you put in your pocket or under your clothes a piece of paper with Qur'anic verses written on it, you are assuming that the writing itself has a power of its own. There is no action in which

you are really and truly involved. You are not addressing Allah at all. This is an action similar to that of a person who keeps a copy of the Qur'an in his car, hoping that it will help him avoid accidents. Accidents are avoided by careful driving, not by putting a copy of the Qur'an in the car. But if you want Allah's help in avoiding accidents, you pray Allah when you are about to start your car to help you drive carefully and avoid any misjudgment on your part and on the part of other drivers. By so doing, you are asking Allah's help. He answers the prayer of anyone who turns to Him for help, acknowledging His Lordship.

•When a person goes into a mosque

When a person goes into a mosque after hearing the call to prayer, should he pray first the sunnah or the two raka'hs recommended as greeting to the mosque?

When you enter the mosque to offer an obligatory prayer, whether shortly after the call is made or at any time, and whether the congregation has finished, the sunnah known as greeting to the mosque is recommended. If, however, you are offering a prayer which is normally preceded by two rak'ahs as sunnah, or recommended, then you offer these, combining with them the greeting to the mosque. In other words, you pray two rak'ahs only intending them to be the regular sunnah of the obligatory prayer as well as the greeting to the mosque. If you enter shortly after the call for prayer is made, you also combine with them the sunnah of athan, or prayer call. That gives you the reward of six rak'ahs when you offer only two. If you enter the mosque intending to stay for some time, [Added: that is if you enter well before the next prayer timing] having offered the last obligatory prayer, you are recommended to offer two rak'ahs in greeting to the mosque. You cannot combine these with any sunnah, because there is no sunnah to offer, since you have already finished your last obligatory prayer. It was the habit of the Prophet (peace be on him) when he entered the mosque not to sit down until he has offered two rak'ahs.

•NASA - the United States Space Agency

The United States Space Agency, NASA, speaks of extra-terrestrial life which may be encountered away from our universe. Is this true? What does Islam say about life in outer space?

What space programs are speaking about at the present stage is exploration of the solar system which is a small part of our galaxy. As you realize, the earth is only one planet in our solar system which has a number of planets such as Venus, Mars and Saturn. Some of these plants have moons of their own, in the same way as the earth has its moon. Distance between these planets extends to millions of miles. Nevertheless, the whole solar system is only a small portion of the galaxy. The universe includes millions and millions of galaxies, each one of them having millions of suns and solar systems. When we imagine such a vast existence, we can speak of outer space. But outer space is part of the one universe which includes all these galaxies.

When you imagine such an almost endless universe, you can easily conclude that it is possible to have life in other parts of it. Indeed, it is only a manifestation of the greatness of Allah and His power of creation that life be present in other planets and solar systems in a variety of forms. Allah has not chosen to tell us about these forms of life because such knowledge would not benefit us in the fulfillment of the task He has assigned to us, namely, to build human life on earth. Moreover, it may be very difficult for us to imagine the existence of other types of life, since we do not have a chance to know them at a close distance.

•Fasting and the state of *janabah*.

You have mentioned last year that a person in the state of *janabah* may fast, even if he delays having his grand ablution until after dawn break. Is it true that a fasting person must have his grand ablution not later than midday?

You have quoted me correctly. If a person wakes up in the morning of a day of fasting and finds himself in the state of ceremonial impurity, i.e. *janabah*, his fasting remains valid. He needs only to have his grand ablution, i.e. *ghusl*. The same applies if he gets into the state of ceremonial impurity during the night and delays having a shower to remove it. That does not invalidate his fasting. Obviously, he may miss *fajr* prayer if he delays having a bath.

That such a person should take his shower before midday is preferable, but if he does not, the delay does not invalidate his fasting. The preference here is only to take care of his prayers. Otherwise, his fasting remains valid. While missing a prayer does not

invalidate fasting, it is strongly censurable. The two acts of worship are treated separately, but missing either one is an act that should not be done by a Muslim.

- *Shab-e-Mairaaj*
- *Shab-e-Qadr*
- Different dates in lunar calendar

Lunar dates do not tally in different countries. This results in confusion over such important occasions as the night of power and the one on which we celebrate the Prophet's night journey. As Muslims are keen to mark the night of power, and since it is one night a year, how could it be timed when the month starts on different days in different countries?

May I first of all clarify a small point about the Prophet's night journey [Shab-e-Mairaaj]. This took place, as far as can be determined, on the night of the 27th Rajab in the 10th year of the start of Islamic revelation; that is, three years before the start of the Islamic calendar. That night, the Prophet was taken by the chief of angels, Gabriel, from Makkah to Jerusalem, where he met earlier prophets and they joined him in a prayer, which he led. He was then raised to heaven and returned to Makkah before the break of day.

Although this was an important event for the Prophet, as it came shortly after the death of his wife and his uncle, the two people who provided him with comfort and support when he faced the determined opposition by his people to his call. Nevertheless, we do not mark the night with any social type of worship because this has not been ordered or recommended by the Prophet. As you realize, in our worship, we must strictly follow the Prophet's teachings. He was the most dedicated and devoted servant of Allah. If he did not do a particular thing as part of his worship, we do not do it. We only follow his footsteps.

It is true that different countries start Ramadan on different dates, with a difference of one day in most cases and extending to two days in certain instances. The fact is that there should be no more than one day difference in starting any lunar month.

As for the night of power, Allah mentions in the Qur'an that it is better than 1000 months. The Prophet has encouraged us to mark it with devotion, recitation of the Qur'an, prayer, supplication and glorification of Allah. Every prayer addressed to Allah on that night is answered. Therefore, Muslims are keen to observe this night every year, with as much

devotion as possible. The Prophet, however, has not given us a specific date for it, but told us to seek it on the odd nights of the last third of the month of Ramadan. This means that it could be the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or 29th night of Ramadan. This applies regardless of the differences in starting the month of Ramadan. Every country counts according to its own start of the month. If it was only one night for the whole world, then it would be an odd night of the month in one country and an even night in another. This will be contrary to what the Prophet has told us.

It may be asked, then, whether there can be two nights of power. The answer is that for every Muslim there is one night of power every year, which happens to be on one of the odd nights of the month of Ramadan. He counts on the basis of his country's calendar. This is the appropriate criterion to apply, since mistakes in starting the month can be made. Take for example the case when the moon cannot be sighted because of an overcast sky, yet the moon has been born. In this case, the Muslims of that area are required to complete the month of Sha'ban, which precedes Ramadan, to 30 days and start Ramadan on the following day. Had the sky been clear, they would have started a day earlier. But the night of power falls, as far as they are concerned on the odd nights according to their start of the month, even though they may realize their mistake at the end and maybe required to fast in compensation later. In such a matter we should not forget that we are dealing with Allah. He rewards us according to our intentions.

•Visiting the graves of so-called saints.

What is the Islamic view of visiting the graves of relatives to pray Allah to make the soul of the deceased rest in peace? People also visit the tombs of saints, thinking that such visits will make Allah fulfil their requests with promptness. How far should we differentiate between a visit to graves expecting the deceased to be of help to us and a visit without any such expectations?

Visiting graves is recommended if it is for the purpose of expressing dutifulness to deceased parents or to remind oneself of the inevitability of death so that one can prepare for the hour when he is no longer able to do anything to improve his situation in the life to come. The Prophet describes death as a silent preacher because when people remember death they remember that they have to do well in this life in order that they ensure a happy future in the hereafter. Visiting the graves of parents is recommended as evidence of dutifulness, at least once a year. [Added: These visits should not be related

to a particular date only, e.g. death anniversaries, etc.] Such visits are rewarded by Allah in the same was as other aspects of dutifulness are.

I hope I have made the purpose of visiting graves very clear. We have to remember that the deceased can not benefit the living. Indeed, it is the other way round. The living can pray Allah to have mercy on those who have died and Allah may answer such prayers. In this respect, the living can benefit the dead. The dead, however, cannot benefit the living. This applies to all people no matter how good and devoted they are during their lifetime on earth. The Prophet says that "a human being" is unable to do anything after his death. The description "human being" applies both to saintly people and those who are weaker in faith. He says: "When a human being dies, all his actions come to an absolute end, except in one of three ways: a continuous act of charity, a useful contribution to knowledge and a dutiful child who prays for him."

Moreover, it is not for us to classify dead people as saints or non-saints. Who are we to judge people, especially those with whom we have had no contact, because they may have died before we were born. Some people may have the appearance of being dedicated to the service of Allah. But how can we judge their intentions? And if we cannot judge those who we know, how can we judge those whom we have not known? As you realize, a person may do a good action, but he may not be rewarded for it because his intention was not as good as the act itself. An example of this type may be given. When a rich person donates several thousands for a charitable purpose in the hope that it will be said of him that he has given a very generous donation then his reward is that reputation which he will inevitably earn. Someone who is less rich and makes a little donation for a charitable purpose, keeping the whole thing secret will be rewarded much more generously by Allah. The reason is that the second person has made his donation only for the purpose of pleasing Allah and earning reward from Him.

As you have said, people do visit the tombs of persons whom they call saints in the hope that they would have their wishes through such visits. Now who will fulfil these wishes? Is it the deceased person in his grave? If the answer is in the affirmative, then we tell that person that he has done a gross error. He has attributed to a dead person powers which he does not have. Moreover, he has appealed to him instead of appealing to Allah for the accomplishment of his purpose. In effect, he has associated the dead person with Allah as a partner. Some people say that they know that the deceased person does not do anything by himself in his grave, but he can appeal to Allah on our behalf. This is absolute rubbish. It makes the dead person an intermediary between Allah and His creation. Allah has said so may times in the Qur'an that he accepts no partners. If people associate

partners with Him He abandons those people to those partners to sort their affairs with them the way they like. Eventually they are the losers because the partners they associate with Allah are of no use to them. It is for this reason that we say time and again that such visits to the graves of deceased people in the hope that the visit will be of use in the fulfillment of the visitor's wishes is an act of polytheism. It is needless to say that it is absolutely forbidden.

To sum up, we must not confuse visiting graves in order to remind ourselves of death and the need to be better servants of Allah or to show dutifulness to our deceased parents on the one hand and visiting the so-called saints in the hope that they will be of use to us, helping in the fulfillment of our wishes on the other. The first action is recommended while the second is forbidden, as it is a polytheistic act.

•Father's property

My father has four sons and he wants to divide his property through a sale deed among his three sons, giving no share to his eldest son, for the following reasons:

My elder brother has never contributed to the family finances, nor has he ever undertaken any responsibilities with respect to the marriage of our sisters or their family matters. Moreover, the three of us shared physically and financially in the construction of an extension to our father's house. Besides, my eldest brother was always disobedient to my father. At times, he went as far as hurting his father's feelings. My father says that if he allows his property to be divided equally among his four sons, he is doing an injustice to the three of us who shared in the building. I will be grateful for your advice.

May I ask you why are you giving only the possibilities of a division among the four sons or three of them only, excluding your sisters who are, I understand, married? If we are speaking of inheritance, daughters, whether married or not, have shares in their deceased parents' property. Allah states in the Qur'an :

"*Allah commands you (in matters of inheritance) with respect to your children that a male child inherits an amount equal to the shares of two females.*" This is a perfectly clear order which assigns a share of inheritance to every daughter.

If it is a gift by a father to some of his children that we are talking about, I would like to remind you that the Prophet has condemned this as injustice. He refused to witness it. Having said that, I do understand your father's feelings. There is an element of injustice if he does not compensate you and your two brothers for the shares you have contributed to the extension of the family home. However, in order not to be guilty of injustice, your father should compensate you for what you have contributed. A fair value on the contribution of each one of you should be determined by mutual agreement. He may effect a real deed of sale of the house to the three of you.

What this means is that what each one of you has contributed should be determined. The house can be then divided into four portions, one to your father and one to each one of you, according to his contribution. The sale may be effected and registered. In this case, your father would be giving you back what you have contributed in order to bring about justice among not only his four sons, but also his daughters. When he dies, the family home does not count as part of his estate to be inherited by his heirs, but only his portion in the house is counted as such. The other heirs will [Added: also] have their shares as Allah has given to them. In this way, no disinheritance of the eldest son is made. Nor are your sisters deprived of their shares either. Alternatively, the three of you may buy the house as a whole and pay your father for his share. But this should be an actual purchase. You should pay the price which must be a fair one, not a nominal one. In either of these ways, you help your father act within the rules of Islamic law.

•Ihraam and covering of head

Last year I went to pilgrimage. During Ihraam, I unintentionally covered my head for a few moments on two separate occasions. I am told that I need to sacrifice a sheep in compensation. Is this true?

It is one of the conditions of Ihraam for a man not to cover his head. If one covers his head for long period during Ihraam, then he has violated its conditions and, as such, he is required to compensate by slaughtering a sheep. But if this happens unintentionally for a brief period, a few minutes or so, this can be considered as a minor error. For such errors, the compensation takes the form of sadaqa or a charitable contribution. If you do not find someone who is really poor in the pilgrimage area, then you need not give it to a beggar, you need only to pray Allah to forgive your error. [Added: Conscious acts are not errors.]

•Eid and sacrifice of sheep

If one is financially well off, should he sacrifice one sheep for every member of his family?

Sacrifice on Eid day is strongly recommended. It is not obligatory. Therefore, it cannot be considered as an obligation on the head of the family or any of its members. However, it remains very strongly encouraged. The minimum that one may sacrifice is one sheep for himself and his dependents. If he sacrifices more, his reward is greater. Obviously, the sacrificial meat should be used in the way recommended by the Prophet. The best division is for one to keep one third for one's family and give one third in gifts to relatives and neighbours, and give the third gift to the poor. If one is sacrificing more than one sheep, and he wants to increase the portion he gives to the poor, his reward is greater.

•Unpaid debts - compensation for late payment

I gave money on loan to a friend for a specified period of time. When the payment was due, my friend, though acknowledging the debt, claimed that he was not in a position to pay. What sort of sanctions has Islam prescribed in such a situation? Am I entitled to any compensation for late payment?

When a case of unpaid debts is referred to an Islamic court, the judge is required to look at the financial position of the debtor. If he finds out that debtor appears to have money in hand, he will order him to repay immediately. If he refuses, the judge may order that he be imprisoned until he has paid his debts. If, however, he claims to be insolvent, the lender is required to wait until he has funds to repay. This is not something that he does by choice. Order to delay payment in such cases is given by Allah in the Qur'an. If the lender foregoes his money in such a case, he will be highly rewarded by Allah, and the reward will outweigh by far the benefit he may receive from regaining the money he had lent. Such an action of forgoing an unpaid debt because of the insolvency of the debtor must be voluntary. No pressure needs to be placed on the lender to relinquish his rights.

I should perhaps remind you that an insolvent debtor is one of the beneficiaries of zakah. Islam recognizes the difficulty of one who finds himself in a position when he cannot repay his debts. The system of social security which Islam establishes takes care of such people who may have tried hard not to get to such a position. They are helped with zakah funds so that they are relieved of the pressures of being in debt and unable to repay.

Compensation to the lender for late payment is unacceptable in Islam. It is akin to usury which Islam strictly forbids. What is the difference between a moneylender who determines beforehand that he will receive a certain amount or percentage over and above the amount he has lent, and one who exacts a financial punishment for late payments? Perhaps I should add that lending to a person in need is an act of kindness. Therefore, you must not waste your reward which you are sure to have from Allah by insisting on having compensation for the late payment, especially if the borrower is truly insolvent.

•Forgetfulness in prayer

Once.I was leading a congregation in Maghrib prayer but I omitted to recite loudly in the first two rak'ahs through forgetfulness. When I had finished, one of these who prayed with me said that we should have offered two prostrations for forgetfulness, otherwise our prayer was invalid. Please comment.

It is recommended to recite loudly in the two rak'ahs of Fajr and the first two rak'ahs in each of the obligatory prayers of Maghrib and Isha. Whether a person is praying alone or leading a congregation, he should follow this recommendation. The two prostrations, i.e. sujood, which are offered at the end of one's prayer and give the name of "sujood sahu", compensate for any omission or addition due to forgetfulness. Books of fiqh abound in details of which errors in prayers may be compensated for with these prostrations. It is perhaps sufficient to say here that if a worshipper omits certain types of obligatory actions of prayer, he should offer these two prostrations before he finishes his prayers. As for recommended things, i.e. those known as sunnah in prayer, no compensation is required for omitting them. Since they are not obligatory, why should something be offered in their stead? Nevertheless, some of these qualify for two prostrations of 'sahu' when they are omitted through forgetfulness.

With regard to reciting aloud or in secret, the rule is well known. As I have already said, reciting aloud in Fajr, Maghrib and Isha is recommended, i.e. a sunnah. Scholars have expressed different views with regard to the omission of reciting aloud and whether it qualifies to be compensated for with two prostrations of 'sahu'. All that we need to say here is that if one offers these two prostrations, one does well and good. If he omits to do them, his prayer is perfectly valid.

Perhaps I should add that if a worshipper who is offering a day prayer, i.e. Dhuhr or Asr, recites aloud in the first two rak'ahs through forgetfulness, and while praying he remembers that he need to have recited aloud, he should continue his loud recitation in the first two rak'ahs. If the reverse situation occurs and a worshipper recites in secret in Fajr, Maghrib or Isha and then he remembers that he should have begun his recitation loudly, he has the choice whether to continue his recitation in private or to start again aloud, while continuing his prayer. He needs to interrupt it and start again. What this boils down to is that your prayer and that of congregation you led was valid, although you have not offered these two prostrations of 'sahu'. Your friend who objected was wrong in saying that the prayer was not valid. Had you done these prostrations, that would have been appropriate as well.

•Prostration related to reading Qur'an

It is well known that prayer is discouraged after one has offered the obligatory prayer of Asr, until the sun has set, and after one has prayed Fajr until the sun has gained some height in the sky. If a person is reciting a passage of the Qur'an at either time and happens to read a verse which requires a prostration, can he offer that prostration?

Since a prostration, i.e. sujood, is part of prayer, it is treated in the same way as ordinary prayer. Therefore, if you are reciting the Qur'an and reach a verse of the ones when a prostration is recommended, you should not do that prostration, according to a large number of scholars.

However, I should explain that to offer such a prostration is recommended, not obligatory. It can be replaced by the glorification and praising of Allah. According to some schools of thought, if you are unable to do the prostration when you reach such a verse, you can say instead: "Subhan Allah, Alhamdulillah, Allahu Akbar" three or four times. Even if you do not do that, you are only omitting something that is recommended.

•Heaven - What is in it for women?

It is mentioned in the Qur'an that there will be women in heaven. May I ask why will they be there? In our country, some scholars suggest that a true believer will be offered as many as seventy such women. Are they

correct? If so, what about women? Being a married woman, I cannot think of my husband having seventy women around him in heaven. I want him to be mine only. Is this possible? Do I commit a sin by entertaining such thoughts? Being a non-Arabic speaking woman, I am intrigued by the fact that every time a reward from Allah is mentioned for a particular action, it is suggested that it will be given to a man. What is the reward for women, then? In the translation of the traditions of Al-Bukhari, the writer makes the comment women can never achieve the grade of men with regard to worship. Is the writer correct? Are men superior to women in Allah's judgement?

When we speak about the life to come, we must bear in mind that whatever we may do, we cannot formulate a "true to life" picture of what things will be like there. How does the resurrection take place? We believe in the resurrection as an essential part of our faith. We have accepted the passage of the Prophet Muhammad as the final and correct message from Allah to mankind, and that the religion of Islam is the faith chosen by Allah for human beings. To believe in the resurrection is a basic requirement of believing in Islam. Hence, we accept it without question. We are told by the Prophet in this connection that women who will be admitted into heaven will be made to look in their best form, full of life and vigor, as they were in their prime of life. How will women regain this form after having lived sixty, seventy or even ninety years? The answer is that we do not know know. We believe in it because we believe that Allah has the power to accomplish anything He wills.

We must also bear in mind the Hadith which describes the luxuries which true believers will enjoy in heaven as follows: "In it (i.e. in heaven) there are things that no eye has ever beheld, and of which no ear has ever heard, and the thought of which no human mind has ever entertained."

This Hadith emphasizes the fact that what those who will be blessed with admission into heaven will have much more than they can enjoy. Yet, there are detailed description of what we are likely to have in heaven. Moreover, the description is made in terms of this life and its luxuries. A Muslim cannot entertain any doubt with regard to the truthfulness of any description given in the life to come. We must no forget that the Qur'an is the world of Allah, and whatever Allah tells us is truth, clear and simple. How do we reconcile the Hadith quoted above with the descriptions of heaven given in the Qur'an? This is very simple. Had Allah described the luxuries and happiness of heaven as they actually are, we

would not have understood his description, because our life experience is too modest to comprehend it. Therefore, Allah has given us descriptions which we can understand through our experience. But the luxuries and happiness of heaven are in actual fact much more than we can visualize. In other words, their measure is much more than we can imagine. It is true that in the Qur'anic descriptions of heaven, the presence of young,pretty woman is mentioned. But it is not to be contemplated for a second that these will compete with the believers' wives over their husbands. Your feelings about wanting to have your husband all for yourself are quite understandable. You will certainly have him as you please, if both of you are included among those whom Allah will bless with admission into heaven. It is perfectly legitimate for a believer to pray Allah to give him or her in the hereafter the same marriage partner they have in this life. As for the number seventy, referring to women who will be assigned to every man in heaven, this is news to me. I have not heard it before. However, seven and seventy are often used in Arabic as figurative numbers. They denote plenty.

Perhaps I should mention another point with regard to the relationship between believers and these heaven women. In this life, the main purposes of marriages are the satisfaction of our natural desire and having children. Indeed Allah has made sex so enjoyable in order to ensure the survival of man. The continuation of human life is part of Allah's creation. This does not apply to life in the hereafter. People in heaven will not go on giving birth to children and increasing their own numbers. At no time the description of heaven given in the Qur'an mentioned children being born to believers. You may, therefore, rest assured that you will not be fighting other women over your husband.

That the Qur'an uses the masculine reference when it speaks of Allah's reward to believers is a requirement of Arabic language. This is indeed the case in many languages. The Qur'an makes it clear that the same reward is given to men and women for the same actions. Allah states in the Qur'an: "A person, whether male or female, who does good works while at the same time he is a true believer shall be given a good life of Us, and We will give them their reward according to their best actions." Indeed, you should read all references to reward in the hereafter that occur in the masculine as equally applicable to the feminine. The Prophet says; "Women are the sisters of men." This denotes total equality between the two sexes, except where differences are necessitated by their physical differences and their different roles.

May I correct you on the last paper of your question. Al-Bukhari has not written this book. He only made a compilation of statements made by the Prophet, making sure of the authenticity of the traditions attributed to the Prophet. He included in his *Sahih* only

those Hadiths the authenticity of which he was absolutely certain. These statements are not made by Al-Bukhari. They were made by the Prophet and Al-Bukhari's role was only to confirm their authentic attribution to the Prophet. May be you are referring to the commentary on the Hadiths listed by Al-Bukhari. If so, this commentary is written by a human being who is liable to err. I do not think that it is correct, from the Islamic point of view, to say that a woman will never attain to the grade of man with regard to worship. This is a fallacy. The fact is that women may excel men in any respect, including work for pleasing Allah.

•Zakah payment to household of the Prophet

May I ask whether Zakah may be paid to those who belong to the household of the Prophet?

Not giving zakah to people who belong to the Prophet's household, this is correct according to a large number of scholars.

However, it must be pointed out that Prophet's household does not have zakah because they have a share of the spoils of war and what the Muslim state may gain. One fifth of that is given to them as well as to orphans, the needy and stranded wayfarers. We note, however, that this is hardly available these days. According to many scholars, this should be offset by giving the poor among them a share of zakah. This view is further strengthened by the fact that many scholars suggest that members of the Prophet's household were not given any zakah during the lifetime of the Prophet. After he had passed away, that prohibition no longer applied. This is indeed a valid view because it suggests that Allah wanted to spare the Prophet and his household any criticism from any quarter which might have accused the Prophet of nepotism. After he has passed away, this no longer applies.

•Fasting in Muharram

What is the significance of fasting on the 9th and 10th of Muharram

When the Prophet settled in Madinah, there was a large Jewish community there. He noticed that the Jews fasted on the 10th of Muharram. He asked them the purpose of their fasting. They said that that was the date when Allah saved the Prophet Moses from a great danger. The Prophet said that he (and the Muslims) were closer to Moses than the

Jews. He fasted that day. He continued to fast on the 10th of Muharram as a voluntary worship until the year when he passed away. That year he said : "If I live till next year, I will fast on the 9th of Muharram". This meant that he would be fasting on the 9th and 10th of that month. Most probably the reason for this was that he wanted to distinguish his fasting in Muharram from that of the Jews, although the reason for fasting is the same.

Perhaps I should add that fasting in Muharram has nothing to do with the events that led to the martyrdom of Al-Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet. That was an event that took place at a time when nothing could be added to our religion or our practices.

•Birth, life and death - feeling of helplessness

May I start by saying that I adhere to Islamic teachings as much as I can. However, I am bothered by the thought that I have no choice as to the very basic step of coming into existence. It may be that my parents wanted so much to have a baby, but why should I be responsible for my birth? May I give the analogy of obeying one's superiors in one's job. We all do this because we do not wish to lose our jobs.

There is nothing wrong with thinking about one's existence. Indeed, we are invited to do so by Allah because such thinking is conducive to strengthening our faith. When sometimes our thoughts do not seem to fit in with our beliefs, we should be a little careful. We should examine our premise and how our thoughts develop. There may be something wrong in the process.

What seems to trouble you, in the line of thinking you are following, as you have explained it to me, is the thought of choice which you seem to desire before coming into existence. But this is the thought of a mature human being about a stage of existence which is very different from his own. May I ask: At what point in time you think a human being should be given this choice at the beginning or end of adolescence? In childhood? Immediately at birth? At the time of conception? Or should the choice be given to the male sperm or female egg separately? If anyone suggests that the choice should be given to the sperm, then would it be fair to give it to every single sperm, although any one in billions is destined to become a full human being? If one suggests that the choice should be given at the time of conception, would a zygote be able to make a rational choice?

Perhaps it is more reasonable to suggest that the choice should be given sometime during one's life, when one has known enough about human life to determine whether to continue with it or not. One could then choose whether to continue with one's life, obeying Allah's rules and taking the risk of punishment in the hereafter if he fails to do so. Otherwise, one is immediately and finally obliterated.

Suppose that such a choice is given, what sort of result would be expected from it? Would you not think that every human being will opt for a continued existence, giving every pledge to follow divine guidance? The love of life makes every single one of us cling to it despite going through very difficult circumstances. We always hope that our situation would improve and we would be able to enjoy a better life. On the other hand, if we say that the choice should be given to us before we are born, would we be able to make a choice based on mature judgement without ever being aware of the outcome of the choice we make?

The fact is that we have a choice at every moment in our lives. While it is true that the choice is not whether to live or not, but what sort of life w should lead. We should not portray the choice in the way you have, as something we have to give in order to avoid future suffering. That is certainly a grim picture if it was true. It is not. What is wrong with the way you describe the choice is that it implies that we will be saved from suffering in the life to come if we are willing to pay a price now, in the form of obeying certain rules. That makes the benefit of our compliance accrue to someone else or indeed to Allah. This is wrong because Allah does not benefit at all by our obedience or compliance of His rules. Read if you will, the sacred (or *Qudsi*) Hadith in which the Prophet quotes Allah as saying:

> *"My servants, you will not attain harming Me so as to harm Me, and you will not attain benefiting Me so as to benefit Me. My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, that would not increase My kingdom in any way. My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as wicked as the most wicked heart of any one man of you, that would not decrease My kingdom in any way. My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to rise up in one place and make a request of Me, and were I to give everyone what he requested, that would not decrease what I have, anymore than a needle decreased the sea if dipped into it. My servants, it is but your deeds that I reckon up for you and then recompense you for, so let him who finds good praise Allah and let him who finds other than that blame no one but himself." (Related by Muslim, At-Tirmithi and ibn Majah)*

If our worship and compliance with Allah's orders does not benefit Him, why are we then required to do it? The answer is: For our own benefit, Allah has created us the way we are, and has sent us messengers to show us how to lead a happy human life. Their role is to point out to us what benefits us and what spares us problems and misery. What they have conveyed to us is a complete message which outlines an integrated system, devised by Allah, who has created man and who knows what benefits us and suits him, to be implemented in human life and to bring man happiness. Thus, when we obey Allah's rules, we are beneficiaries. The benefit is immediate, because the rules are made so that they spare man affliction, contradiction and confusion. You say that you try to live by the Islamic code. Have you asked yourself: What benefit to Allah are your prayers and your fasting? When you think deeply about it you are bound to conclude that they can benefit Him in no way. But prayers certainly benefit you by keeping you always on your guard against temptation and falling in sin. Fasting also teaches you self-discipline. When a human being puts Allah's constitution behind his back, it is he who suffers. He does not harm Allah in any way. So the choice we have in this life is whether to do what is right and enjoy its benefits immediately in this life, or to reject it and suffer the consequences of this rejection.

Moreover, complete obedience to Allah is not possible, not even by the best human beings. Everyone is liable to error and every one errs. But when we do, we seek Allah's forgiveness and it is forthcoming when our request is genuine. Let us not forget that a human being may be in error throughout his life, but then he realizes his mistake and repents them, seeking Allah's forgiveness. He may die shortly after that, but he is forgiven everything he has done in his past. If you take this example and that of a person who lives the most pious life and put them together, what do you get? You will find that even the most pious person slips often enough to incur punishment. He cannot thank and praise Allah enough for His blessings, yet he disobeys Him. If Allah were to treat him according to the merits and demerits of what he does, he would throw him in hell., But Allah does not do that. He forgives everyone who turns to Him in genuine repentance, even the most wicked of mankind.

Therefore, we must not view our obedience of Allah's message as something which is sufficient to ensure our salvation. Our salvation is attained only through Allah's grace. But the choice is ours throughout our lives. The choice is to adopt a responsive or defiant attitude. Although when we make the right choice, we do not live up to it, Allah's grace is so great that our choice ensures our salvation.

•Divorce in Islam - clarification of -

1. After being married for eighteen months, my nephew had an argument with his wife which resulted in her departure to her parents home. Twenty-five days later, he called her by telephone to ask her to come back. However, on the phone they argued again and, in a sate of extreme anger, my nephew pronounced the words " I divorce you " four times. Regretting what had happened, my nephew consulted several scholars and he came out with two different rulings. The first, according to fiqh, says that as he divorced his wife more than twice, he cannot be reunited with her without an intervening marriage of his divorcee to another man. The other ruling, according to Qur'an and Hadith, says that all four pronouncements count as one divorce, and as such, the divorcee can be reunited in marriage. Their families are at a loss and do not know what to do in the face of these two conflicting rulings. Could you please clarify the situation? May I say that my nephew is a follower of Qur'an and Hadith.
2. I read many questions and answers regarding divorce in your paper, but unfortunately the exact process is not yet clear to me. Could you please let me know how a man can divorce his wife and what instructions he should follow, and when the process is complete, what are the duties of an ex-husband towards his divorced wife.

Let me first of all say very clearly that there is no such thing as fiqh which can be taken as something separate from, or put in opposition to Qur'an or Hadith. Fiqh is a branch of Islamic scholarship which explains the details of Islamic legislation on the basis of commandments and instructions stated in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Different scholars may arrive at different conclusions on a particular subject, because they may not have the same statements in Hadith available to them. The Qur'an is available to all, but some of its statements may be given in general terms with Hadith explaining or qualifying them. The two rulings you r nephew received from scholars in his home town are both given by scholars of fiqh on the basis of the Qur'an and Hadith. Wherever a person goes in the Muslim world, he is bound to be given the same two rulings by scholars. Not only so, the same scholar may explain to him both rulings. How is this possible?

The answer is the supporting evidence for each ruling. There is no doubt that both have very valid evidence. We cannot dismiss either ruling out of hand, nor can we ignore its basis. Scholars of highest repute in our history subscribed to either one or the other. How can then a layman manage his own situation and which ruling he should follow? The simple advice is that he should go to a broad minded scholar and explain his case. He should make sure that the scholar does not strictly follow a particular school of thought but rather is one who gives a judgement on each case according to its merit, and as he deems most suitable to the people concerned, using any judgement given by different schools of thought as long as it has sufficient supporting evidence to keep the enquirer within the boundaries of what is acceptable from the Islamic point of view.

I do not think that much purpose can be served by a detailed discussion in a newspaper like ours of the different factors relevant to each of the two rulings. However, I can say very briefly that the one which makes a divorce pronounced three times on the same occasion count as three divorces came into operation during the time of 'Umar without disagreement by any of the learned companions of the Prophet. It was more in punishment for a degree of abuse of the Islamic process of divorce. There is no disagreement among scholars that to divorce one's wife three times or more on the same occasion is forbidden from the Islamic point of view because it is an abuse of a legitimate procedure.

When the Prophet was told by one of his companions that he divorced his wife one hundred times on the same occasion, the Prophet was very angry. He addressed his companions in such terms, *"Is Allah's Book to be trifled with when I am still alive among you?"*

However, the overwhelming majority of people who divorce their wives three times on the same occasion nowadays do so out of ignorance. They think that unless they pronounce the word of divorce three times, the divorce is not valid. Hence an explanation of the divorce process in Islam needs to be given time and again until people get to know how to approach divorce, which is disliked by Allah, should they ever need to resort to it. Perhaps I should add that divorce in Islam is a very simple process but well entrenched misconceptions tend to obscure it. Here it is in simple terms :

> Essentially marriage is a verbal contract and its dissolution is normally made verbally. When a man intends to divorce his wife, he should make sure that she is not in her menstruation period and that the two of them have not had sexual intercourse during her current period of cleanliness from menstruation. If either

case is there, i.e. if the woman is in the period or if sexual intercourse had taken place, then to effect a divorce at that particular time is forbidden. Thy should wait until the woman has finished her period or until she has had her next period. The divorce process is started with a simple utterance of the words "I divorce you," or "I divorce_"(naming one's wife). This should be done ONCE ONLY. This can also be done in writing and sent by post. From that moment, a woman starts her waiting period which lasts until she has completed three menstruation periods or three periods of cleanliness from menstruation. If she does not have the period either because she is too old or too young, then her waiting term lasts three months. If she is pregnant, the waiting term continues until she has given birth. During this time, she stays in her home, i.e. her family home where she has been living with her husband. He is not allowed to turn her out. He is required to maintain her through this period but may not share the same bedroom. She is not required to do any housework. The waiting period provides both divorcees with time to reconsider their situation. If they wish to be reunited in marriage, they may do so within the waiting period without any need to have a fresh marriage contract or to pay a fresh dower. If they do not resume their marriage until the waiting period is over, then the divorce process is complete and the woman returns to her parents' home and is entitled to get any deferred portion of her dower. She is not entitled to any maintenance for herself from her ex-husband. If, however, she has the custody of any young children, they are entitled to be supported by their father. Both are also entitled to maintain their normal relationship with their children. On the other hand, if the divorcees want to be reunited in marriage after the waiting period is over, they may do so provided they have a new marriage contract and the woman receives a new dower

This whole process may be done twice. If a man and wife go through the divorce process for a third time, whether they were reunited each time during the waiting period or after it, their divorce this time is final, in the sense that they cannot be reunited again in marriage without an intervening marriage by the woman who must be married to another man in the normal course of events. This means that to all intents and purposes the divorce is final. If the woman receives a proposal from someone else and accepts it and marries him, her marriage must be intended for life. If, however, she gets divorced after a period of time, may be a year or may be ten years, or longer or shorter, she may return after the end of her new waiting period, to her first husband if both of them think that this time their marriage may be successful. I must emphasize here that this intervening marriage must not be arranged for this purpose, as many people unfortunately do. If it is specifically arranged for this period, and the man hired for the purpose agrees to go through it for one night or a

week or whatever, everyone involved is committing a serious sin. Moreover, such an arrangement has no effect whatsoever. In other words, the woman cannot return to her first husband on the basis of such an 'arranged' intervening marriage.

Having explained the process of divorce, I should say to my first reader that his nephew may consider his divorce to be a single divorce. He can be reunited with his former wife after having a new marriage contract, since her waiting period is over. He should tell his nephew that to divorce his wife three times on the same occasion is forbidden. Perhaps I should add that the family law of several Muslim states adopts this ruling as the standard one. By doing so, the scholars who have codified the family have given due consideration to what serves the interests of the Muslim community and the fact that many people pronounce three divorces at the same time out of total ignorance. His nephew should not be confused by the two rulings and let him not think that to follow fiqh is different from following the Qur'an and the sunnah.

•Bridegroom staying in the house of bride

An ancient social custom in my part of the world differs from what prevails in most other places, in the sense that after marriage, it is the bridegroom who stays in the house of the bride. Some religious preachers from outside the city are now saying that this practice is contrary to the Qur'anic rulings. I heard a preacher saying in his Friday sermon that the Qur'an instructs a Muslim man who divorces his wife to keep her in his home during her waiting period. How can a man abide by this instruction if he stays in her house? Please comment.

I admit to my surprise that it is the social custom in your part of the world that after marriage the man stays in the woman's home. As you say, this is contrary to what prevails in most parts of the world. However, social traditions differ from one place to another and what is traditionally valued in one place may be horrifying to the population of another. Take for example the simple requirement of a dower made by the man to his prospective wife, as a requirement of the marriage contract. In some places, within the Muslim world, this is reversed because it is the wife's family who pays a dowry to the prospective husband. The larger the amount of the dowry, the better the husband they may be able to secure. In the situation you describe as prevailing in your city, it is the wife's family who is responsible to provide a home for the prospective married couple.

My surprise, however, is much greater at those preachers you have described claiming that this is forbidden in Islam and giving the hollow argument of what happens in case of divorce. I am here judging by your statement. What I would have expected preachers who have had a sound Islamic education to do is to emphasize the rights and duties of each of the two marriage partners. To do so, they would need to emphasize that every Muslim must support his wife, even if she is better off than him. He should provide her with accommodation, food, clothing and medical care according to his means. If he fails to do so, he is in breach of his duties and she may claim these by right. The best division of responsibilities in the family is that which the Prophet advised to his cousin, Ali and his daughter, Fatima. The Prophet was the fairest of human beings. He treated all people on the basis of justice. Never did he favour any person if that meant being unfair to another. Indeed he could pay or incur a liability or responsibility which he need not have incurred, if that meant that everyone would get his fair share. He would not be unjust to his own daughter, not would he be unjust to his cousin who was married to her, for anything in the world. The advice he gave them was that the man was responsible for what is done outside the house and the woman was responsible for what is inside. This means that she takes care of the family home and the upbringing of children, while he works and earns the living of the family.

Having said that, I add that it is permissible for Muslims, regardless of what relationship they may have, to give each other by way of gift whatever they wish. It is not wrong of anyone to accept a gift except where it means bribery. The Prophet himself accepted gifts, although he never accepted charity. If a woman makes a gift to her husband, he is free to accept it. This applies to her dower and to anything else she may have. She may give him a house to live in, or she may gift him with the usage of the house, retaining its possession herself. What is most important to realize in this regard is that the gift should be given freely, without pressure or coercion. If a husband insists on his wife to give him a gift, large or small, then he is doing something forbidden. But if she gives him the same thing or an ever better one freely, he incurs no blame for accepting it.

In your situation, perhaps it is best to look at the tradition in your part of the world as a gift being given by the bride's family to the bridegroom. As such, he is free to accept it. It is not uncommon in parts of the world, where accommodation is scare, for a rich father to give his daughter a flat or a house as a gift. He may have a variety of reasons for doing so, including securing his daughter's future after his death. He may think that should problems arise in her marriage and she gets divorced, she will have something to fall back on and she will not be abandoned. If the daughter gets married, she is free to make her house the family home, in which case, the husband moves into her house.

Let us now turn to the situation which those preachers have mentioned and determine what are the responsibilities of the couple in case of divorce. When a man divorces his wife, by saying to her that he divorces her, she starts her waiting period which lasts until she has completed three menstrual periods or three periods of cleanliness from menstruation. If she does not menstruate, her term is three months. If she is pregnant, her waiting period lasts until she gives birth to her baby. During this time, she remains in the family home and her husband is not allowed to turn her out except in a case when she commits gross indecency. During her waiting period, the married couple may resume their marital relationship, which means the cancellation of the divorce and the reinstatement of the marriage. This does not require a new marriage contract or a fresh dower. It only requires the agreement of both parties to the new arrangement. This system serves multiple purposes. One purpose is to allow the separating man and wife, a chance to reconsider after tempers have cooled down. They will be facing the prospects of going their separate ways and the closer the time draws for their separation, they will be thinking hard about their future. They may reflect on what has happened and determine that it may be in their best interest or in the best interest of their children to be reunited.

If the man is living in the woman's home, this obviously cannot be done because it is he who will have to leave the house. In most cases, it will be determined that practicalities require that the man should leave. This does not abrogate the waiting period, when the woman is not allowed to get married to someone else. It would only mean that they reflect on their situation when they are apart. The gift which was given to the man in the first place is no longer applicable. The man should still pay maintenance to his divorcee during her waiting period but it does not follow that he should take her to his own home. Perhaps we should mention here that another purpose of the waiting period is that the woman will have time to do her arrangements. She does not suddenly find herself in the street, if she has no close relatives to whom she may go. But if she is in her own home, this does not apply. In short, if the preachers have nothing more to say about the situation, I find their argument hollow and unacceptable.

•Qur'an - presenting copies to non-Muslims

Is it permissible to present a copy of the Qur'an to a non-Muslim? In this connection, what do the Verses 77-79 of Surah - 56 mean? Why did Umar's sister insist that he performed ablution before she gave him the scroll of the surah entitled Taha, when he was still a non-Muslim?

Some scholars argue that it is not permissible to give the Qur'an to non-Muslims. They fear that non-Muslims may not respect the Qur'an or may ill use it. If we suspect that a particular person may ill-use the Qur'an, it is certainly not permissible to give that person a copy of it. On the other hand, if we feel that the person concerned will treat the Qur'an with due respect and wants to read it in order to understand it, then we can give it to him. The Prophet sent messages to rulers of neighboring states and included in his letters verses from the Qur'an, knowing that those rules were not Muslims. We should not forget in this connection that Qur'an is applicable to all mankind and we have to make it known to them. It is our duty to convey the message to them and to call on them to adopt Islam. Therefore, if we find that some of them want to learn more about Islam, the best source from which to acquire that knowledge is the Qur'an.

The verses to which you refer may be rendered in translation as follows :

> *"This is indeed a noble Qur'an, contained in a well-guarded Book, which none but the purified may touch."*

Many scholars say that 'the purified' refers to the angels whom Allah has made pure. They alone can touch the well-guarded Book in which the Qur'an is written in heaven. Some people take these verses to mean that only after one performs ablution, one may hold the Qur'an in his hand. But the Qur'anic verse does not seem to support this view since having an ablution is an act of purification which a man chooses to perform. He does not become "purified" as a result of it. The purification to which the Qur'anic verse refers is something done by Allah. Hence, it is a reference to angels.

The incident to which you have referred occurred when Umar, receiving the news that his sister and brother-in-law have become Muslims, went to see his sister, threatening to kill her. At that time, Umar was still a non-believer. His brother-in-law went into hiding in his own home, while Umar's sister, Fatimah, opened the door. She admitted that she was a Muslim and Umar struck her on her face. The blow was hard and there was blood on Fatimah's face. Despite his strong norms, Umar was kind-hearted. He felt sorry for his sister as he saw her bleeding. He demanded that she give him the scroll from which she was reading. She told him that because he was a non-believer, he could not touch it until he had ablution. He went and washed. She gave him the scroll to read. He was surprised by its powerful logic and accepted Islam.

We cannot take this incident as a basis to formulate any rules about the conditions in which non-believers can handle the Qur'an. Fatimah acted in the spur of the moment.

Most probably, she wanted her brother to cool down before he read the Qur'an. She felt that if he washed his face and hands that would have wonderful effect on him. She was right. She did not mean that he will be purified by the ablution, because nonbelievers cannot be purified that way. Ablution does not mean a thing if a non-believer performs it. The fact that the Qur'an describes non-believers as impure means only mental impurity which is not removed by ablution. It is removed by acceptance of Islam. On the other hand, ablution is a mental purification for Muslims which puts them in the right frame of mind to address Allah in their prayers.

•Can non-Muslims teach Arabic?

In my village in India, a young woman who is not a Muslim was appointed by the government as a primary school teacher and was given the task of teaching Arabic, since she is a graduate of Arabic. Muslim parents have refused to allow her to teach their children the language of the Qur'an as they claim this is not allowed by Islam. Is this true?

It is examples like that which strengthen my belief that the most important thing Muslims need these days is a good knowledge of Islam. You have here a situation where Muslim parents prefer their children not to learn Arabic because the teacher is a non-Muslim. From where did they get the notion that a teacher of Arabic must be a Muslim. I do not know. The notion is highly mistaken. It cannot be supported by any logical reason. These parents may think that because Arabic is the language of the Qur'an, it is sacred. There is no such think as a sacred language. Indeed, Islam does not speak of anything as sacred or holy. These parents may think that an Arabic teacher will have to teach their children passages of the Qur'an. As a non-Muslim, their teacher is not allowed to read the Qur'an, or so they think. Little do they realize that Allah has addressed the Qur'an to non-believers on every occasion, so that they might listen to its argument and realize the truthfulness of its message. If we were to stop non-Muslims from listening to the Qur'an and learning its message, how do we expect them to have a favorable view of Islam?

Nor is there any evidence to support the view of these Muslim parents. Indeed, we have evidence to show the fallacy of their view. After the battle of Badr, the Muslims were left with 70 prisoners of war. The Prophet decided to allow their relatives to buy their freedom. However, to those prisoners of war who were able to read and write, he made the offer that they could buy their freedom by teaching ten Muslim children to read and write. Obviously those teachers were teaching Muslim children Arabic writing and reading. They

worshipped idols and associated partners with Allah. They indeed were polytheists. But that did not stop the Prophet asking them to teach Muslim children their Arabic language. Some of these polytheists accepted the Prophet's offer and completed their task of teaching Muslim children writing and reading, and then they were set free. You may tell those Muslim parents in your village this example, to help them benefit by the services of the Arabic teacher. Otherwise, their children may not be able to learn Arabic.

Having said that, I realize that if the Arabic teacher in your village was a good scholar of Qur'an, he or she can be an infinitely better teacher. But if such a person is not available, let us make use of the facility which is available.

•Marriage in secret

When I was on my home leave last year, I ran away with a woman and arranged for our marriage to be performed in a friend's house, who acted as her guardian. What prompted us to do so was that she was being forced by her parents to marry someone she did not want. Our marriage could not be consummated because of her illness at that time. However, we went back to her family, but her parents refused to recognize the marriage. They claimed that we cannot be considered as man and wife because they had not consented to this marriage in the first place,. and because she is staying with her parents and supported by them. Perhaps I should add here that she only returned to her family's home after her parents agreed initially to celebrate our marriage. Could you please let me know whether our marriage is valid or not.

To start with, you should not have taken that woman away from her parents in order to marry her. Marriage is a relationship which starts a family. It, therefore, must remain a family affair from start to finish. When a woman is living with her parents, she may not just go out and get married without their consent. She must have a guardian who acts for her in conducting her marriage. When her father is present, no one may have guardianship other than him. Moreover, the Prophet says, "No marriage may be contracted without the presence of a guardian and two witnesses."

It is true that according to the Hanafi school of thought, the marriage may be valid. However, in the face of this clear and authentic Hadith, the opinion of any scholar which

clashes with it is not to be taken. Sometimes scholars may take a weaker opinion in preference to a better supported one because the circumstances of the case make the application of such an opinion likely to serve a more important purpose. A case like your where the marriage was carried out without the consent of the wife's parents may be given a ruling of valid marriage, adopting the opinion of Imam Abu Hanifah, if the circumstances require that. Suppose that the marriage has been in effect for several years and several children were born into that marriage. The wife's parents may have already relented and accepted the marriage as an accomplished fact. When such a case is put to a scholar, he has a very strong reason to let things stand as they are, taking into consideration the interests of the young children as something of paramount important. Any scholar who opts for this opinion will be looking at the fact that the Hanafi school of thought was implemented in the Muslim state for several hundred years.

Having said that, I must add that in your particular case the same cannot be applied. Your marriage has not been consummated and your lady is still living with her parents. Why should we overlook the express Hadith in favour of a ruling by a scholar, eminent as he certainly was. No man's opinion may be taken in preference to a clear and authentic Hadith.

You say that your friend acted as your lady's guardian. What right has he got to do so? A woman may ask someone whom she trusts to act for her in her marriage contract only if she has no Muslim relative who may undertake the task. But to ask anyone to be a guardian only because he is willing to oblige in a situation which is kept secret from the woman's family is unacceptable. The case would have been different if the woman was living in a place far from the rest of her family and she sent to the judge of her locality and explained matters to him, and he consented to her request to be her guardian. Such an arrangement would have been acceptable. But in your case, the situation is simply a marriage undertaken without the consent of the woman's father. Therefore, its validity is strongly suspect.

Having said that, I must add that since the woman's parents promised you and their daughter to make the necessary arrangements to sanction your marriage, they should honor their promise. To start with, they should not have tried to force their daughter to marry someone she did not want. If she wanted someone else and he is acceptable on account of his faith and honesty, they should not withhold their consent.

The Prophet tells all parents : " *If you have a proposal by someone whose faith and honesty you find acceptable, then sanction his marriage. If you do not do so, chaos and much corruption will be the result.* "

•Restrictions on women

A Muslim woman who is keen on abiding by the teachings of Islam is nevertheless very assertive of her freedom. She claims that there is nothing in the Qur'an to suggest that women cannot travel alone. To her, freedom means that she can travel wherever and whenever she wishes. Please comment.

This lady is partly right. There is nothing in the Qur'an to suggest that women cannot travel alone. May I suggest, however, that it is also not mentioned in the Qur'an that we should pray five times each day. We are only commanded in the Qur'an to attend regularly to our prayers. The number of times we should pray every day, and how we should pray and the time range for each prayer and the number of rak'ahs included in each, and what part of our prayer is obligatory and what is voluntary are all matters that have no mention in the Qur'an. Nevertheless, every Muslim the world over and in all generations knows that we must pray five times each day, within a specific time range for each prayer, and our five prayers include 17 obligatory rak'ahs and some voluntary ones. Moreover, there is no disagreement among Muslims on the form our prayers should take or what should be included in it as a matter of duty. If anyone denies any part of these facts, he runs the risk of being considered a disbeliever, because he is denying something of Islam which is essentially known to all people. The same can be said about numerous aspects of the faith of Islam. Only a few regulations about pilgrimage are mentioned in the Qur'an, but there is little difference among scholars on what parts of pilgrimage are essential for the completion of this important duty.

What I am driving at is to emphasize that it is not necessary that something is specifically mentioned in the Qur'an for it to be obligatory to all Muslims. We have a general rule clearly stated in the Qur'an which tells us that we must obey the Prophet, whatever he commands us. Allah says *"So take what the Messenger gives you, and refrain from whatever he forbids you. " (59 ; 7)* This Qur'anic verse illustrates that the Prophet's orders have Allah's support. This is only right because, in whatever relates to the religion of Islam, the Prophet only conveys to us Allah's revelations.

In the Qur'an Allah tells us, referring to the Prophet : *"This fellow man of yours has not gone astray, nor is he deluded, and neither does he speak out of his own desire : that (which he conveys to you) is but (a divine) inspiration with which he is being Inspired. " (53 ; 2-4)*

Therefore, what you should explain to this lady is that Islamic orders can be given by the Prophet, and all Muslims must abide by them. The Prophet has told all Muslim women not to travel alone, because Islam takes good care of women. When a woman finds herself in a foreign country, on her own, she may be vulnerable to a variety of risks. Having her husband or a male companion who is a close relative of her by side will ensure her safety and protection.

•Segregation and seclusion of women
What is the purpose of women's segregation and seclusion?

I am not exactly certain of what you mean by women being kept in seclusion. If you are suggesting that women are kept at home all the time, this is hardly true anywhere in the Muslim world. They certainly move within women's circles, visiting their friends and relatives and receiving visitors.

As for complete segregation, leaving women to have their own gatherings away from those of men, much of this is social tradition. What is forbidden in Islam is for one man to be alone in an enclosed area with one women to whom he may be legally married. That includes his first cousins. In order to remove this prohibition, they would be joined by at least another woman, who may preferably be one of his relatives to whom he may not be married, such as his mother or sister. As for the presence of many men and women in a social gathering or in a lecture hall or a meeting hall, this is permissible in Islam, provided that women should wear proper Islamic dress which covers their heads and all their bodies with the exception of their faces and the lower part of their hands. What Islam does not like and does not approve of is the sort of intimate mixing which happens in other societies, where married men and women interact in complete disregard of Islamic standards of propriety.

Moreover, in a congregational prayer, men and women do not stand in the same rows. Men's rows are in the front and women's in the back. This is no indication of any superiority, since all of them are offering the same prayer as they are all required to offer it. It is simply a matter of organisation which takes human nature into consideration.

The fact that there are different Muslim countries with some of them being much stricter than others, with regard to mixed social gatherings. I would like to say that the proper Islamic method is somewhere in between the liberal and the strict attitudes. It is, the middle way which meets people's needs and provides proper limitations to prevent excesses. Both the strict and the liberal communities have gone away from the Islamic middle road and their movement is based mostly on social traditions rather than Islamic teachings.

•Girls traveling for study

Can Muslim girls go to a non-Muslim country for study and enroll in a mixed institution of education?

What a Muslim girl should not do is to travel alone, whether to a Muslim or a non-Muslim country. She must be accompanied by a mahram who may be either a husband or a close relative whom she may not marry,\such as her father, brother, son, uncle, etc. You must have noticed that here in Kingdom, when a woman signs a contract for employment, she is required to have a mahram coming with her. If she does not have a mahram she may not be issued a visa, despite her having a contract of employment.

Studying in mixed institution of education depends on how the students conduct themselves.\That a woman attends a lecture in a university which is attended by both men and women is permissible.\What is not permissible is to socialize in the way it is practiced in the West.\Therefore, if a Muslim woman observes the standards of propriety then she may pursue her studies in any institute.

•Tablighi Jamaat

Members of an organization called Tabligh Jamaat travel for varying periods, extending at times to four months, when they go around the country, and to foreign countries, to preach Islam. Their aim and objective is to invite their Muslim brothers to the mosque for prayers. They take leave from their work and leave their families in order to go on these missions, often living and sleeping in mosques. Please comment on this practice.

The propagation of Islam is the duty of all Muslims. The name tabligh means conveying the message of Islam. Hence, the idea of this organization is sound. To go from one place to another in order to explain Islam to people and to call on Muslims to be more conscious in the fulfillment of their Islamic duties is commendable.However, to say such activity is done in practice by some people leaves much to be desired.

The system followed by the Tabligh organization is to ask its members to devote a certain portion of their time to the propagation of Islam.A member is expected to devote one hour a day, or one day a week, or one week every month or two, or one month a year, when he would go out and call on people to attend more conscientiously to their Islamic duties. At times, some missions spend four months with the sole purpose of conveying Allah's message.Members who go out on these missions are supposed to pay for their transport and their living expenses. Members who are well off can support those who are not, when the latter intend to go on a mission.

The strongest emphasis is based on prayers because the society believes that when a Muslim attends regularly to his prayers, he is set on the way to be a better Muslim and his prayers will have a positive effect on his behavior making him a better person.

All this is sound in theory, when people take an active part in the propagation of Islam, they feel that they themselves must be more diligent in observing their Islamic duties. It is true that some people may think, after completing a task in the service of Islam, that they have done their duty and may become a little lax in their observance of Islamic duties or in doing what they need to do in order to improve their own understanding of Islam and work better for it.What is important is to follow a successful mission with actions which are calculated to enhance one's commitment to the cause of Islam, and to make the next mission even more successful. Furthermore, important as it is to remind Muslims that they must attend regularly to their prayers, it is not sufficient. People must learn what while prayer is the cornerstone of Islam, building an Islamic community requires much more than a cornerstone.

Going on extended mission of four months or so raises a few questions. It may be that the leaders of the society have made in clear it their guidelines that anyone who wants to go on such a mission must meet certain conditions, such as having acquired a minimum standard of understanding Islam, having provided well for his family during his absence, and not allowing equally or more important duties to be neglected during his absence. Take, for example, a man who has a young family, with two or three children still at school and a young wife.He may leave his wife enough money to look after the family for the

whole period of his absence, and he may ask a close relative, such as a brother, to look after his family, but I do not think that such a prolonged absence in such case is justified, especially when we consider the fact that there is much to be done within the local Muslim community. The man will render a better service to Islam if he concentrates his efforts on bringing up his children as good Muslims and using his spare time to help his local Muslim community understand Islam better.

An example of misuse of this system is found in the fact that some people who live in Europe may take themselves out of work, get registered with the state as unemployed and draw social security benefits for their families to live on while they go abroad, or even travel within the same country, on their propagation work. Such an arrangement cannot be approved by Islam. I am certain that the leaders of the society of Tabligh would not approve of it either. Still it is done.

•Pilgrimage alongwith a child

If a child offers the pilgrimage, should his parent who has taken him to pilgrimate offer a sacrifice on his behalf in the same way as adults do, should he peform all the rituals of pilgrimage.

When a child is taken to pilgrimage, the pilgrimage should be complete. Every duty required in pilgrimage should be complete.Every duty required in pilgrimage should be performed either by the child himself or by his parent accompanying him.\If the child is too young to walk, the tawaf counts as that of child and the father should do his own tawaf later. A reward of the pilgrimage is credited to the child and an additional reward credited to the parent. If the pilgrimage is done in the tamattu' or qiran method, then a sacrifice on behalf of the child is due in the same way as it is due to the parent himself.

•Surah *'At-Tawbah'* and *'Bismillah'*

Why does surah 9 not start with the normal beginning which translates as "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Beneficent".

Surah 9 entitled 'At-Tawbah' or 'repentance', exposes the true qualities of the hypocrites and threatens them with a woeful doom. It can be likened to a stern warning made in the strongest terms. Hence, an opening which stresses divine mercy and compassion does not seem particularly fitting to the subject matter of the surah. Therefore, Allah has not

started with the phrase you have mentioned which begins every other surah in the Qur'an. To recite this phrase at its beginning is forbidden because it constitutes an addition to the Qur'an which is not part of it.

•Present order of the Qur'an

The present order of the Qur'an is not according to its revelation. What was the reason for this? Was it done according to a particular directive by the Prophet?

The Qur'an is Allah's Book which He revealed to the Prophet through the Angel Gabriel. Everything that has to do with the Qur'an is, therefore, directed by Allah. It is true that the Qur'an was revealed at different times and places and some verses were revealed to provide guidance with regard to particular occasions and events. However, the Prophet could be receiving Qur'anic revelations of different surahs at the same period in time, with all of these surahs not being complete yet. When he received such revelation, he also received guidance as to its place in the Qur'an. The Angel Gabriel would tell him : these verses come after such and such verse of such and such a surah. Nothing was left to discretion or to competent scholarship. Allah's Book is given in the order Allah has chosen.

The same applies to the arrangement of the surahs. It is true that the arrangement does not follow a chronological order. It is arranged in the best order which a book meant to provide guidance to all generations of humanity should take. It was often the case that Qur'anic revelations dealt with particular events as and when they happened in the life of the Muslim community. Hence the order of revelation suited that particular and additional purpose. As for later generations, they have the Qur'an complete and they refer to any part of it as suits their circumstances. The ordering of the surahs is also divine. The Prophet used to receive the Angel Gabriel when the two of them recited the Qur'an to each other, once every Ramadhan. In the last year of the Prophet's life, they recited the Qur'an to each other twice. Moreover, the Prophet used to read the Qur'an in the order we have now.

The compilation of the Qur'an which took place after the Prophet had passed away was ordered by Abu Bakr, the Prophet's first successor as a ruler of the Muslim state. You are certainly aware that Abu Bakr's reign lasted only two years. He put in charge of this task a young companion of the Prophet who knew the Qur'an by heart and had a full command of its recitation and ordering. He completed his task before Abu Bakr had passed away.

Some fifteen years later, the third caliph, Uthman, appointed the same man, Zaid ibn Thabit, as the head of a commission charged with writing six copies of the Qur'an, making use of the earlier compilation, to send one copy to each capital of the Islamic provinces to remain as a reference for Qur'anic scholarship.

[Added: The sanctity of the Qur'an is guaranteed by Allah Himself. It is no wonder then that we see no change in the order of the Qur'an, in its every detail.]

•Limited Marriage

In a recent discussion with friends, it was mentioned that a marriage known as "mut'ah" was permitted at the Prophet's time. It was later prohibited by the second or third caliph. Similarly, an addition to the call to prayer for Fajr was made in the words "As-salat kahrun mina al nawm." Please comment.

What has been mentioned in your discussion is incorrect. Mut'ah in the context of marital relationship means a marriage intended for a specified period of time. This is declared at the time the contract is made. The prospective husband mentions to his prospective wife that they are marrying for a year or a longer or shorter period, and she agrees to that. When the period is over, their marriage is dissolved automatically. This is not acceptable in Islam. It was the Prophet who declared that it is forbidden. He made this declaration on his return from the expedition to Tabuk, at the head of a large army. The confusion arises from the fact that there are reports that one or two companions of the Prophet had such a limited marriage when they were with the army on the way to Tabuk. This might have been so, but the express prohibition was made on the return journey. Even if these reports were true, they signify nothing more than a new restriction forbidding something that had been practiced in the past. There are numerous examples of such things.

As for the addition to the call to prayer, it was made at the time of the Prophet. It is true that when the athan, i.e. call to prayer, was learned, it did not include such words which means "Prayer is better than sleep;" The words of the athan were taught to Bilal and he started practicing them. The following day, when he made the call to Fajr prayer, he added these words. The Prophet smiled and approved. Since then, these words are part of the call to Fajr prayer. As you see, the Prophet has sanctioned this addition which takes effect as a part of the athan.

•Qur'an translations.
Which translation of the Qur'an do you recommend?

This is a very difficult question to answer. There are numerous translations of the Qur'an into English. None of them can be recommended without reservations. The one which has been widely used is that of Mr. Yousuf Ali. Its numerous footnotes are of help in understanding the meaning of the text. Dar El-Ifta has undertaken a project to publish it with some amendments and corrections. I am not sure whether this new version has been published yet. Its main drawback is that it is a little apologetic. The translation done by Mr. Pickthall is much too literal, which makes it a little difficult to read. On the other extreme, we find Mr. Dawood's very readable, but tends to give himself too much licence and, at times, he changes the order of the text rather arbitrarily. He has also rearranged the surahs in a highly arbitrary manner. Mr. Asad's translation is rendered in a very good style, but he follows a strictly rational explanation of the text of the Qur'an, which leads him, at times, to make gross errors.

These are but a few examples which I have given to explain the difficulty I face in giving an answer to this question. If one has to use a single translation, perhaps Yousuf Ali's remains the safest. But the use of such translation should be only to have an initial idea of the meaning which should be supplemented by wider study.

•Prayers and women's makeup.
•Physical use of alcohol

Some of the substances which a woman uses as part of her makeup, such as perfume, hair spray, anti-deodorants and facial and body powder may contain alcohol. What should she do, if she wants to offer her prayer? Some women pray wearing their full make up, including lipstick. How far is this correct.

What seems to be the point at issue in the first part of your question is the fact that alcohol may be an ingredient of the substances used. It is well know that intoxicants, all of which are alcoholic drinks, are described as impure. The question is whether such impurity is imparted to other substances in which alcohol is an ingredient.

To answer, I would like to point out that the weightier opinion is that the impurity of alcohol is not physical. In other words, if alcohol is dropped on someone's clothes and then it

dries up, the person concerned need not wash his clothes to remove the impurity. He may use them in prayer without having to wash them first.

Hence, if a man or a woman uses perfume or after-shave or anti-deodorant spray or any similar substance which includes alcohol, they need not worry about offering their prayer in the normal way just on account of having used such substances.

In matter of using makeup, Islamic rulings appear to take account of the fact that women need to use such substances more than men. For example, it is not possible for a man to offer prayers, if he has used saffron over any part of his body. There is no such restriction on women. A man, however, may use saffron over his clothes and offer his prayers. The Prophet used to do that, because saffron gives clothes a better appearance.

If a woman wants to go to the mosque to offer her prayers, she may not go wearing perfume, unless its smell has disappeared. This restrictions is not made on account of the substance of perfume itself, but on the basis of the fact that its smell may attract attention to her. As you realize, when a Muslim woman goes out, she must dress in a way which does not attract passers by. If she is praying at home alone or with a group of Muslim women, she may offer her prayer without removing her makeup first. If she removes some of her makeup which stands out as particularly noticeable, such as lipstick, this is preferable according to some scholars.

•Urus, graves and saints

Some people in my part of the world observe certain rituals in the month of Rajab when they sacrifice goats and sheep and organize a ceremony called "Urus", in memory of certain saints. They visit the graves of such saints and ask them to intercede for them with Allah. They contend that the Prophet is still alive. Please comment.

It may be useful to say at the beginning that visiting graveyards in order to reflect on life and death and to remind oneself of the hereafter is recommended. To visit the graves of one's deceased parents is a mark of dutifulness. It is needless to say that when a Muslim visits the graves of his parents, he should supplicate for their forgiveness and pray Allah to admit them into heaven. When one enters a graveyard, he greets the dead and says something to this effect, "We will certainly follow you along this road." It is also appropriate to read some verses or passages from the Qur'an and pray Allah to credit the reward of the

recitation to the dead. But it is forbidden to build mosques over graves, or to pray in between graves or towards a grave.

I have briefly outlined what may be done when we visit the graves of dead people or a graveyard. This is indeed the same as we do when we visit the grave of the Prophet (peace be upon him). But what people do when they visit tombs or graves of those whom they consider to be saints is totally different.

We also need to be clear about something. The term "saint" is not an Islamic term. No one can be described as a saint. By calling a person a saint or treating him as such, we do make a judgement with regard to his destiny in the life to come. How can anyone claim to be able to judge another person ? Even if the man lived a life which can be described as saintly, how can we judge his intentions and motives ? These are only known to Allah and it is He who judges people.

What people do when they visit the graves of those whom they consider saints is tantamount to worshiping either the grave of the one who is buried there. Many, if not all, of those who make it a ritual to visit the graves of such people tell you that they want the "holy" man buried there to intercede with Allah on their behalf, so that a particular objective of theirs is fulfilled. This is indeed a form of polytheism which Islam will never accept. Indeed, it takes the person who commits such an action out of the fold of Islam altogether. Allah tells us in the Qur'an that He is near and that He answers the supplication of anyone who prays to Him. What need is there for anyone to intercede with Allah on behalf of any person or for any purpose ? Such people are quick to answer this question by saying that they themselves have not observed their Islamic duties well enough to have their prayers answered. Little do they reckon with Allah's limitless grace. They forget that by making their appeal to Allah directly, they acknowledge His Lordship and that is sufficient to have their prayers answered, provided that they ascribe no partners to Allah. But they ask a dead person, regardless who he was and what sort of life he lived, to intercede on their behalf with Allah. By doing so, they are guilty of polytheism. They actually say that a dead person has an influence with Allah which he does not have.

Ignorant indeed are such people. They do not realize that the dead can be of no benefit to the living. How can a person already dead and buried be of benefit to any living man when he cannot hear a living person addressing him. Allah says to the Prophet : "*You certainly cannot make those who are in the graves hear you.*" If the Prophet cannot make a dead person hear, would the dead person be able to hear anyone else ?

The opposite is true. The living can benefit the dead by praying for them and asking Allah to forgive them. The Prophet says : " When a human being dies, all his actions come to an absolute end, except in one of three ways " *a continuing act of charity, a useful contribution to knowledge, and a dutiful child who prays Allah for him.*"

As for the state of the Prophet, we say that he has a life which is a stage in between our present human life and the life of the hereafter. What is the exact nature of this life, we do not know. He certainly does not intercede with Allah on behalf of anyone.

To sum up, entreating a dead person to intercede with Allah on behalf of a living person is a form of polytheism which takes the one who does it outside the fold of Islam altogether. The dead cannot hear us and cannot be of benefit to us. We cannot make them hear us. What people do at the graves of those whom they consider to be saints is a form of worship of the person in the grave or of the grave itself. If we have something to be accomplished, we pray to Allah directly to help us achieve what we want.

•Raising hands in supplication

A learned man has said that it is an innovation to raise one's hands in supplication after an obligatory prayer. Is this correct?

It has been authentically reported that the Prophet raised his hands in supplication during prayer. It is also reported that when he raised his hands in supplication, his armpits were seen through his sleeves. This report suggests that the Prophet was not in prayer when he did so. His companions would have been offering prayers with him. I see nothing wrong with raising hands in supplication. I think that an elêment of splitting hairs is involved when one says that you can raise your hands in supplication if you are offering a voluntary prayer but you may not do so after an obligatory prayer. I have not seen a Hadith restricting this practice.

•Exchange marriages

I got married two years ago on the basis of exchange marriage. This was against the wishes of my brothers and parents. I am afraid my marriage has not gone well at all. I recently read that this type of exchange marriage is not liked by Allah. Is this true? If so, how can I rectify my

mistake? The difficulty is that if I have some problem with my wife, my sister suffers as well, because she is blamed for our problems.

I have some bad new for you. Your marriage is not valid at all nor is your sister's marriage. This type of marriage is known in Islamic terminology as 'shighar'. Abu Hurairah reports that Allah's messenger (peace be upon him) has forbidden shighar, which means that one man says to another: Marry me your daughter and I will marry you my daughter; or marry me your sister and I will marry you my sister." (Related by Muslim). In another highly authentic Hadith, Abdullah ibn Amr reports that "Allah's messenger (peace be on him) has forbidden shighar which means that one marries his daughter to another on condition that the other man gives him his daughter in marriage, without mentioning any dower." (Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim). These two Hadiths are perfectly clear in forbidding exchange marriages altogether.

It is not surprising that this is forbidden in Islam, because it is an exchange deal which looks at women as though they were commodities that could be bought and sold. When a woman gets married, she is entitled to receive a dower which becomes her own property and she may dispense with it the way she likes. In such an exchange marriage, a dower is not commonly mentioned. Even if it is mentioned and specified, the condition that the marriage will only go through if the exchange deal goes through is enough reason to invalidate the two marriages altogether.

It is not surprising that you are having problems. You also mention that your sister is having problems as well. May be the reason is due to the fact that both women feel that they were treated like two inanimate objects which were exchanged.

If the marriage is invalid, then there is no way to make it valid. What you have to do is to make it clear to both families that both marriages are not valid. Each of the two women goes back to her family and the two relationships are terminated forthwith. When this has been done, everyone of the four parties, meaning yourself, your sister and the other man and his sister are free to marry other people. Similarly, it is open to you to propose to the women you have described as your wife. Since you have been having problems, most probably you do not wish to do so. That is indeed better. But if you feel that you may have a chance to lead a happy life and you want to marry her, you make your proposal as if there was no relationship whatsoever between the two of you. You agree terms of the marriage without any reference to the past relationship. You agree an amount of dower which you have to pay her and she is free to use that money in the way she likes. There must not be the slightest hint that when your marriage goes through, your sister will be married to your

wife's brother in consequence. Otherwise, you would be back in the same situation and both marriages will be invalid.

Perhaps I should explain that a man may marry a woman in the normal way without any third party being involved in any way whatsoever, and the marriage goes through after payment of the dower and the contract being made as Islam describes. Sometime later, it may so happen that one of the relatives of the woman wants to marry a relative of her husband, this is permissible because the two marriages are separate and no condition was attached to the first one that the second one will follow. If there are any such conditions, then the conditions are not valid and there may be doubt about the validity of the marriage itself.

•When Muslims boycott each other

The Prophet says :

> *Do not hate each other and do not envy one another, and do not turn your back on each other. Servants of Allah, be always brothers. It is not lawful for anyone to boycott his brother for over three nights. They may meet and each of them turns his face away. The one who is first to greet he other is the better one of the two of them.*

This Hadith shows how much importance Islam attaches to the brotherhood of Muslims and how it discourages any action that tends to weaken the bond of his brotherhood.

That means that it is permissible, although by no means encouraged, for two Muslims not to be on speaking terms for a shorter period. This should be understood as a concession which is given in view of what quarrels may take place between people who are otherwise good Muslims. It is only natural for a human being to get angry at times and to allow his anger to get the better of him. This may lead to an estrangement or a boycott between them. Muslims who find themselves in such a situation are allowed three days to let their tempers cool down. Quarrels which result from long harbored hate or envy will take much longer to mend. However, we are commanded by the Prophet not to entertain such feelings for any length of time against fellow Muslims.

Perhaps it should be added here that when a person fears that his continued relationship with a particular person is bound to cause him harm, whether in respect of his worldly interest or in respect of his fulfillment of his Islamic duties, he will be right not to maintain a

very close relationship with that person. He need not boycott him altogether, but he may keep him at arm's length.

Sometimes when a quarrel takes place between two persons, they regret it and both of them are eager to mend the relationship, but they cannot bring themselves to start the process of reconciliation. Each of them feels that he will be compromising his dignity if he goes to the other and greets him warmly as if there has been no quarrel. The Prophet encourages us not to allow such a consideration to stop us from doing what is right.

It is not easy for people to overcome their ego and bring themselves to greet a person with whom they have quarrelled especially when they genuinely feel hurt that the other person was totally in the wrong. But it is this particular attitude which the Prophet wants to play down so that it does not prevent Muslims from making things up after they have quarrelled. A Muslim always tries to excel. He wants to earn more reward so that he makes sure of being forgiven for his sins on the day of judgement. So the overriding criterion for a Muslim is what to do in order to earn Allah's pleasure and receive more reward from Him. When the Prophet points out a method or an action which makes a person better, his very statement proves a motive for every Muslim to follow that message or to act on that advice. This particular concept makes it easier for a Muslim to overcome his pride and to start the process of making up, although he may feel that he was the one oppressed.

•How Islam views theft.

The Qur'an says :

> *" As for the man or woman who is guilty of theft, cut off their hands in retribution for what they have earned, as an exemplary punishment ordained by Allah. Allah is almighty, Wise. But whoever repents after having thus done wrong, and makes amends, shall have his repentance accepted by Allah. Allah is much-Forgiving, Merciful."*
> ['Al-Maidah' : 5 ; 38-39]

When the Muslim state was stricken by famine, Caliph Umar suspended the enforcement of punishment for theft. The servants of the son of Hatib ibn Abu Baltt'ah stole a camel which belonged to a man of the tribe of Muzaynah. When they were proven guilty, Umar ordered their hands to be cut off. However, on learning that their master kept them hungry, Umar stopped the enforcement of this punishment. He further punished their

master, imposing on him a fine equivalent to the price of two camels. It is within this context that we should view the punishments imposed by Islam as a part of comprehensive system which provides guarantees for all.

We cannot properly understand the wisdom behind a particular point of detail in Islam unless we understand the nature of this system, its basic principles and its guarantees. Moreover, details of the Islamic system should not be implemented in isolation to the rest of the system. We cannot simply take one legal provision or one principle of Islam and try to implement it in a social setup which is not Islamic. Such an attempt is useless, nor can such an action be considered an implementation of Islam.

•Divine Law

The divine law is a single and complete whole which cannot be split into separate parts. Its provisions which concern the concept of faith, or acts of worship, or permissions and prohibitions, or social regulations and international relations are all of equal value. In their total sum they constitute the religion which Allah describes in the Qur'an as having been perfected. To reject any part of this code is to reject it all, and to reject religion or faith altogether.

The law of the particular time in which the Qur'an was revealed applies to all time because, according to Allah's own statement, it is the law of the religion revealed to mankind to be implemented by all communities for the rest of time. The detailed regulations and laws will remain the same, while the basic principles constitute the framework within which human life develops and progresses.

> *[This day I have perfected your religion for you and bestowed on you the full measure of My blessings and chosen Islam as a religion for you. - The Repast, "Al-Maidah" : 5;3]*

•Ablution

Islam establishes some kind of link between worship and other legislations. Washing some parts of our bodies as we do in ablution or having a full bath as we do in grand ablution are not merely meant for physical cleanliness. This is an attempt to unite the

cleanliness of the body with the purification of the soul in the same act of worship which a believer addresses to his Lord.

•Ablution, purification - women's

Is it necessary for a woman to have a full shower or bath before she prays, if she has had a vaginal discharge which may happen at any time of the day without a particular cause?

Having a full shower for purification is necessary for a woman only at the end of her menstrual period and after the discharge of postnatal blood has stopped. It is also obligatory for both man and woman after sexual contact which involves even partial penetration. For a man, it is obligatory after ejaculation, whether deliberate or voluntary, as in the case of a wet dream.

When we have learned this, the simple answer to your question is that a discharge of the type you have described does not require a full shower. It should be treated, however, in the same way as urine, in the sense that it invalidates ablution. Purification must be carried out first, by washing the place with water. If it has fallen on any part of your clothes, or your body, the spot where it has fallen should also be washed. When you have carried out this, you only need to have a new ablution in order to be able to offer your prayers.

However, if a woman is in doubt as to whether this discharge is the beginning or end of menses, she has to ascertain the fact first since the difference in ruling is total. If the discharge is white in colour, there is no doubt that it does not require a full shower. A simple ablution is sufficient.

•Four imams

In chronological order,

- Imam Malik ibn Anas lived in Madinah most of his life. His grandfather was a companion of the Prophet.
    - Imam Abu Hanifah was called Al-Nu'man ibn Thabit. He was of Persian origin, but lived in Iraq.

Imam El-Shaf'ie was born in Ghaza and traveled when still a young boy to Madinah where he studied under Imam Malik. He also traveled to Iraq where he met the leading scholars of the Hanafi school of though such as Imam Abu Yousuf. He then traveled to Egypt where he spent the last five years of his life.

The Hanbali school of thought was founded by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who lived mostly in Baghdad. He was a close friend of Imam El Shaf'ie. Both learned from each other, although Imam Ahmad, the younger scholar, was keen to maintain this close relationship which lasted until El-Shaf'ie left Baghdad for Egypt.

•Inheritance and the 'will'.

Islam has a detailed system of inheritance, which specifies shares for each heir. The system caters for all situations and the details of each heir's share is outlined in the Qur'an. The will is the provision which allows a Muslim to leave a portion of his money either for charity or for relatives who are not among his heirs. Perhaps it should be added that the shares of each of the heirs is determined by Allah. No heir can be left an additional amount by will and none maybe disinherited. The system ensures fair distribution of wealth and militates against the concentration of wealth in a few hands.

•Abandoning the Qur'an

When Muslims broke their covenants with their Lord and abandoned the Qur'an, they suffered the set backs and calamities known to everyone. It is true that they continue to be enhanced with musical recitations of the Qur'an and may use it as charms, but this is not the purpose for which the Qur'an was revealed. Indeed, when the Qur'an is not implemented in the lives of the Muslim community, it is effectively abandoned by it, regardless of how much lip service is paid to it.

•Justice

Part of the covenant with which Allah has bound the Muslim nation requires it to deal with other people on the basis of absolute justice which is never affected by feelings of love or hatred, or by a relationship, interest or feelings of any type. It is justice which is based on the duty of remaining steadfast in devotion of Allah alone. No influences are ever allowed to tilt the balance of justice, especially when believers are mindful that Allah watches over them and knows what is in the bottom of their hearts.

•Oppression

Oppression is, indeed, the most hateful practice a human being may follow. It is degrading to the one who commits it and to the one at the receiving end of it. It is for this reason that Islam stresses in a variety of methods the importance of justice. The Prophet lists seven groups of people who will have Allah's shelter on the day of judgement. The first of these is a 'just ruler'. With such emphasis, it is not surprising that Islamic history has known a long chain of fair-minded rulers.

•Matters are left to the clear intention

The fact that a person who is so hungry that he fears for his life is allowed to eat even forbidden types of food only shows that Islam asks for what is easy, and always gives situations of necessity the sort of rulings which ensure that no affliction is caused to its followers. In the end, matters are left to the clear intention and to being conscious of what Allah requires of us. A person who is driven by an extreme situation to eat of these forbidden types having had no intention of committing a sin, will suffer no punishment.

•Directives and rituals

Religious directives are complemented by practical steps which aim at shaping life in a certain fashion. If religion were to be confined to directives and rituals, then the directives will remain unimplemented. A complete way of life on the basis of religion is necessary to allow its directives to be put into practice in situations where directives and practices complement one another. This is the Islamic view of religion which makes it a complete system regulating all aspects of life.

•Permissibility and prohibition

In Islam, question of permissibility and prohibition is closely related to the more important feeling of being conscious of Allah and fearing Him. It is the pivot round which every intention and every action in the life of a believer turns. Thus, it transforms human life into a relationship with Allah and a recognition of His greatness and a consciousness of His presence and power in all situations, whether we are alone or with others: "And have fear of Allah; indeed, Allah is swift in reckoning."

•Satan

Both Satan and his allies are too weak to be feared by any believer who relies on his Lord and has His support. The only power to be feared is the one which can truly cause harm and benefit. That is Allah's power, feared by those who believe in Allah. By fearing Him alone, they are the most powerful of all people. No other force can stand up to them.

> [*It is Satan who prompts people to fear his allies: so, have no fear of them, but fear Me if you are truly believers. The House of Imran - "Aal Imran " 3*]

•Fardh

That is fardh which Allah has made obligatory for everyone of us, such as prayers, fasting, zakah and pilgrimage. Reward is earned by fulfilling a fardh and punishment is incurred by omitting it.

•Wajib

A wajib is also obligatory, but to a lesser degree. Witr prayer, after Isha, is considered wajib by certain schools of thought. While its omission is strongly reprehensible, it does not specifically incur punishment.

•Rukn

An action may be a rukn of an overall obligatory action. When it is omitted, the whole action is rendered invalid. We say, for example, that attendance at Arafat on the ninth day of Thul-Hajjah is a rukn of pilgrimage. If a person does all the other duties of pilgrimage without reaching Arafat before dawn of the following day, which is the time limit for pilgrimage attendance, he has not met this rukn and, therefore, he has not offered the pilgrimage.

•Sunnah

Sunnah is something that has been recommended to us by the Prophet. Voluntary prayers are sunnah, some of which have been given more emphasis than others, and these are called "mu'akkadah". In prayer,.certain voluntary prayers were observed by the Prophet, and these are termed as mu'akkadah. Others were done only occasionally by the Prophet and these are termed 'ghair mu'akkadah."

•Haraam

That which is haraam is everything that has been forbidden by Allah or His messenger. Obviously, committing something haram earns punishment. Avoiding it earns reward. Thus haram, is the opposite of fardh.

•Nafl

A Nafl is an act of worship done because it has been suggested to us by the Prophet and practiced by him on one or two occasions. [Added: It earns a reward and its omission does not incur any punishment.]

•Mustahabb

That which is mustahabb is something which we are encouraged to do. Like sunnah and nafl, it earns a reward and its omission incurs no punishment. Nor are we questioned about its omission, since it has not been particularly stressed that we should do it.

•Mahrook

That which is mahrook is an action which can be described as reprehensible or detestable. If a person resists temptation to do something of this sort, he earns a reward. Its commission, however, is not punishable but a person may be reproached for it. Tanzihi and tahrimi are two words to qualify what is reprehensible. The latter denotes a very strong objection to it. When something reprehensible is described as tanzihi, this description means that a good Muslim should avoid it.

•Jihad

Jihad could be a simple action, such as standing firm in defense of the cause of Islam. This may require speaking out in public, against ignoring Islamic principles, and writing articles or publishing books. It may also take the form of reminding people of their Islamic duties and motivating them to conduct their lives according to Islam. Its top and most noble form is to fight the enemies of Islam in battle in order to foil their attempts to smother the call of Islam.

•When illness prevents a good action

If a person is in the habit of doing something good and finds his illness preventing him from continuing with it, Allah credits him with the reward for that habitual good action as if he had performed it. The Prophet says: "Whoever falls ill will be credited with what he used to do when healthy "

•What is pride?

The Prophet equated pride with associating partners with Allah. So his companions were naturally curious to know what constituted pride. The Prophet's definition was :" *Ignoring the truth and denying people their right.* "

•What is faith?

The Prophet says :

> *" It is a belief that is deeply entrenched in one's heart and to which credence is given by action. "*

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